

‘Planting seeds of racial healing’: Racial reconciliation groups, churches host community conversation

By Madison Peek
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Leaders of the co-sponsoring groups - First Baptist Church, Let Freedom Ring Foundation, St. Martin's Episcopal Church, the Historic Triangle chapter of Coming to the Table and Williamsburg Christian Church - pose with the authors of "Not So Black and White." Pictured are (L-R) Rebecca Parsons, Reggie Dabbs, John Driver, the Rev. Reginald Davis, Laura Hill, the Rev. Lisa Green, Connie Matthews Harshaw and Kimberley Hundley. Courtesy of Let Freedom Ring Foundation

WILLIAMSBURG — Racial reconciliation groups and Williamsburg churches came together on Saturday to host a conversation about race and faith.

The event featured the authors of “Not So Black and White: An Invitation to Honest Conversations about Race and Faith,” a book written by two longtime

friends who delve into the history of racism in America and the church and how to engage in conversations about race.

More than 100 attendees gathered virtually and in-person at Williamsburg's historic First Baptist Church for the event, which was co-hosted by First Baptist Church, St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Williamsburg Christian Church, Let Freedom Ring Foundation and the Historic Triangle chapter of Coming to the Table, a national racial reconciliation organization.



The view from the sanctuary of First Baptist Church in Williamsburg during the "Not So Black and White" book discussion on July 30. Courtesy of Let Freedom Ring Foundation

The discussion touched on the racial reconciliation work happening in Williamsburg and how it applied to national conversations about race.

“We also know that there is a movement here to reclaim history. Reclaiming history is just about acknowledging and building monuments to forgotten

history, to African American forgotten history,” said Laura Hill, founder of the Historic Triangle chapter of Coming to the Table.

Several ongoing projects in Williamsburg are working to tell Black stories, like the reconstruction of the [Bray School](#), the purchasing of the [James Custis Farm](#) and the investigation into the remains found at the original [First Baptist Church site](#).

“We’re really excited about the new path that Williamsburg is on,” Hill added.

“Not So Black and White” authors Reggie Dabbs and John Driver dive into the history of racism in the United States in their book, which was inspired by conversations between the two friends after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020.

“It began with a story of taking an inventory of our theology, of what we really believe about grace, what we really believe about brothers and sisters in Christ, what we really believe about community — leading to the story historically, what’s really happening and what has happened in our country and whether or not that could lead to some real change,” Driver said.

Dabbs is a public school communicator and event speaker who lives in Fort Myers, Florida, while Driver is an author and executive and teaching pastor at the Church at Pleasant Grove near Nashville, Tennessee. Their book was published in October 2021.

The duo wrote in their book how Christians should come together to combat racism and that being truly faithful will also mean standing against racism in every form. To do that, they said, people must learn the historical, systemic racism in society and how to have a conversation about it.



Reggie Dabbs and John Driver, authors of "Not So Black and White: An Invitation to Honest Conversations about Race and Faith" at First Baptist Church in Williamsburg. Courtesy of Kimberley Hundley

Moderators and audience members asked a variety of questions, ranging from theology to politics to personal experiences growing up with racism. In response to a question about cross-cultural friendships, Dabbs shared wisdom from the woman who raised him.

“Everybody chocolate — you might be white chocolate or milk chocolate or you may be all chocolate,” Dabbs said. “Some people, you just remember, you don’t know where they’re from. You don’t know what happened to them to make them like that. What I want you to do is love them anyway.”

Many attendees shared how they grew up with racism and how the messages of the talk inspired hope. The activist groups said they hope the changes they’ve seen in the area can lead to change in other areas across the nation.

“We understand that what happens here in Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown, known as America’s Historic Triangle, reverberates throughout the nation,” Hill said. “We are planting seeds of racial healing and racial reconciliation and racial justice.”