

# News

## Divided America: Neighbor Churches, Split on Race Lines, Work to Heal Divide

By Rachel Zoll  
AP Religion Writer

MACON, Ga.— There are two First Baptist Churches in Macon — one black and one white. They sit almost back-to-back, separated by a small park, in a hilltop historic district overlooking downtown.

About 170 years ago, they were one congregation, albeit a church of masters and slaves. Then the fight over abolition and slavery started tearing badly at religious groups and moving the country toward Civil War. The Macon church, like many others at the time, decided it was time to separate by race.

Ever since — through Jim Crow, the civil rights movement, desegregation and beyond — the division endured, becoming so deeply rooted it hardly drew notice.

Then, two years ago, the Rev. Scott Dickison, pastor of the white church, and the Rev. James Goolsby, pastor of the black church, met over lunch and an idea took shape: They'd try to find a way the congregations, neighbors for so long, could become friends. They'd try to bridge the stubborn divide of race.

They are taking up this work against a tumultuous backdrop, including the much-publicized



The Rev. James W. Goolsby, Jr., senior pastor of the First Baptist Church, left, and the Rev. Scott Dickison, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Christ, right, pose for a photo at Dickison's church in Macon, Ga., on Monday, July 11, 2016. There are two First Baptist Churches in Macon — one black and one white. Two years ago, Dickison and Goolsby met to try to find a way the congregations, neighbors for so long, could become friends. They'd try to bridge the stubborn divide of race.

deaths of blacks at the hands of law enforcement and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Next month, they will lead joint discussions with church members on racism in the history of the U.S., and also in the history of their congregations.

"This is not a conversation of blame, but of acceptance and moving forward," Goolsby said.

Like many American institutions, houses of worship have largely been separated by race, to the point that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called Sunday mornings "one of the most segregated hours." Recently, several denominations, from the Episcopal

Church to the Southern Baptist Convention, have tried to look critically at their past actions going back centuries.

In the early 1800s, in Baptist churches of the South, whites and blacks often worshipped together, but blacks were restricted to galleries or the back of the sanctuary. Eventually, black populations started growing faster in many communities. Whites, made uneasy by the imbalance, responded by splitting up the congregations.

This was apparently the case for First Baptist in Macon, which built a separate church for blacks in 1845, then finalized the separation two decades later soon after the Civil War ended.

Goolsby and Dickison said their respective churches were enthusiastic about plans to work together, under the auspices of the New Baptist Covenant, an organization formed by former President Jimmy Carter to unite Baptists.

Yet excitement mixed with apprehension, since the effort would inevitably require "some challenging conversations," Dickison said, including a re-examination of the official church history, which had been recorded in mostly benign terms, with almost no recogni-

tion of racism.

"We need to go through this kind of conversion experience of confession, of repentance and of reconciliation. We need to have that when it comes to race, not just in the country but within the church," Dickison said.

Goolsby recalled that after the massacre last year at the historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina, he was outside a store, awaiting his wife, when Dickison called.

"Scott shared how he felt, how he was strug-

gling with what he would share with his congregation," Goolsby said. Dickison asked how he could show support.

"I said, 'We're already doing it,'" Goolsby said. "The mere fact he thought to call me was huge."

The stakes were even more personal months later, when the white church invited black church members for a youth trip to Orlando.

Goolsby's teenage son was among those invited.

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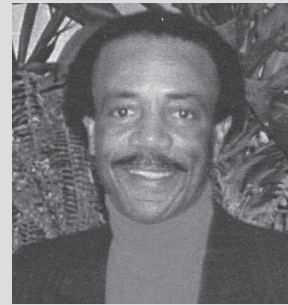
### OBITUARY: Eugene Hughes, Sr. aka Gene Diamond

April 18, 1938 - August 13, 2016

Gene was born in Southern Illinois. After graduating from Douglass High School in Mounds, Illinois, where he was a "star member" of the basketball team, he moved to Chicago and married his high school sweetheart. It was while living in Chicago that he started his professional singing career.

His experience of singing in the Junior Choir of the family church served as a natural induction to working with James Cleveland Gospel Chimes and Mahalia Jackson. His transformation to a jazz singer occurred as he worked with The Ramsey Lewis Trio, Gene Harris and the Three Sounds, The Bobby Bryant Quintet, Quincy Jones' Orchestra, Gerald Wilson's Orchestra, H.B. Barnum, and numerous others.

After moving to Portland, Oregon, he performed on television, in concerts, at intimate nightclubs, on radio, and at jazz festivals. His work with the music department at Port-



Eugene Hughes, Sr.

land Community College developed into what is now known as the Mt. Hood Jazz Festival. He was a premier performer with "Art Quake" and the "Cathedral Park" concerts. Gene's musical versatility allowed him to

move with ease from sensitive love songs to funky blues to country.

To continue his legacy, Gene leaves his wife of 59 years, Leora Hughes, his two sons, Eugene, Jr. of New York, NY and Brian C. of Portland, OR and his only daughter Beverly F. of Owings Mills, MD. He also leaves two granddaughters, Briana Hemphill, a graduate of Temple University and Nya Hughes, a second year student at Stanford University. Additionally,

celebrating his life is his sister, Geneva Adams, his brother, Robert Earl Hughes, both of Illinois and a host of cousins, nieces, and nephews. The family asks anyone who wishes to honor Gene's life to make a donation to "First Tee."

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to join us for  
service!**

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