

National Black Church Initiative

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NBCI's 34,000 Black Churches Hail *Let Freedom Ring Challenge*

*First Baptist Church and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Event
Inspires Reflection and Progress*

Washington, DC – The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans, is honored to endorse the *Let Freedom Ring Challenge*, an important event in Virginia taking place during Black History Month. This remarkable initiative spotlights the Black church's legacy and through storytelling and the restoration of the First Baptist Church's historic bell, restored by Colonial Williamsburg experts, which will toll each day in February to call for reflection on the Black faith experience in America.

“The First Baptist Church, founded in the same year American gained its independence, is the perfect place for this important reflection, and represents a remarkable tribute to the Black church in America” said Rev. Anthony Evans, NCBI President. “First Baptist – a nexus of trials, tribulations, and hope – tells the important story of our rich history. Even today, its symbolism continues to illustrate race relation struggles facing our society. During February we encourage everyone who is able to take a look back at how far we have come, and how much further we have yet to go.”

Throughout the month, First Baptist Church and Colonial Williamsburg invite all Americans to come and ring the bell, which has been silent for decades. An engineering and conservation team led by Colonial Williamsburg experts determined the age, foundry, and provenance of the bell, and has completed the painstaking process of restoring it in time for it to toll throughout Black History Month.

“We are going to challenge the nation, Americans of every color, faith, and creed, to take a turn at ringing the bell,” said Mitchell B. Reiss, president and CEO of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “This church and this bell follow the arc of the American story of independence, but this was a dream deferred for far too many. As a nation we constantly strive to form a more perfect union, based on liberty, rule of law, and human dignity, and as current events remind us, that work is forever unfinished.”

A multitude of programs throughout February that bring African American history to life complement the *Let Freedom Ring* Challenge, including “A Century of African American Quilts” and Jim Crow HERO! Live educational broadcast.

For more information or to reserve a time to ring the bell at the First Baptist Church, visit <https://www.letfreedomringchallenge.org>.

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI’s mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. Our methodology is utilizing faith and sound health science.

NBCI’s purpose is to partner with major organizations and officials whose main mission is to reduce racial disparities in the variety of areas cited above. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI’s programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work. Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.

About First Baptist Church

First Baptist Church of Williamsburg originated in 1776 with a quest by a group of courageous slaves and free blacks who wanted to worship God in their own way. In their search, they left the church of slave owners, such as Bruton Parish Church, where worship was formal and restrained. First led by Moses, a free black itinerant preacher, they built a brush arbor at Green Spring Plantation a few miles from town to gather secretly in song and prayer. Organized as Baptists by 1781 under Rev. Gowan Pamphlet, an enslaved man in Williamsburg, worshippers moved to Raccoon Chase, a rural area just outside Williamsburg. A member of the white Cole family, moved by their stirring hymns and heartfelt prayers, offered the group the use of his carriage house on Nassau Street for a meeting place. Pamphlet continued as pastor until his death about 1807. The African Baptist Church, as it became known before the Civil War, dedicated a new brick church on Nassau Street in 1856, the congregation’s church home for the next 100 years. It was renamed First Baptist Church of Williamsburg in 1863. The present church at 727 Scotland Street has served the congregation since 1956.

About the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences, such as the street theater Revolutionary City[®] and the RevQuest: Save the Revolution![™] series of technology-assisted alternate reality games, highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 400 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.