

Bridgers of the Gap Ministries

The Wings of Forgiveness

A Global Healing and Reconciliation Project



COTONOU
BENIN

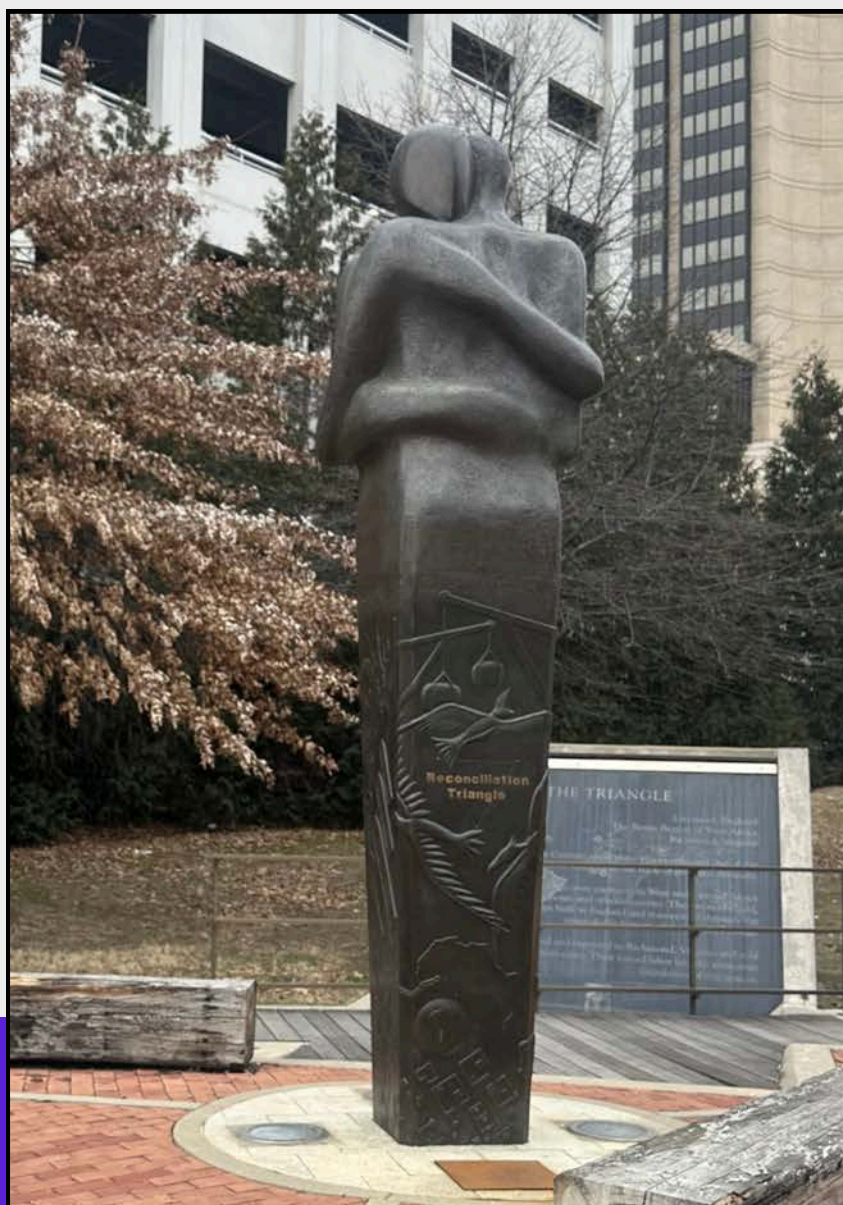
HAMPTON
VIRGINIA

LIVERPOOL
ENGLAND

OUIDAH
BENIN

OXFORD
ENGLAND

RICHMOND
VIRGINIA



WINTER
2025



On January 21, 2025, BOTG visited the Reconciliation Statue in Richmond as the first stop on our journey to proclaim forgiveness for the atrocities of slavery.

*In our forgiveness, we have the
power to break the cycle of bondage,
to build a legacy of freedom for
future generations.*

Photo taken at the Greater Williamsburg National Day of Racial Healing January 21, 2025. Sponsored by the Virginia Racial Healing Institute



Pictured: Laura Hill, Lisa Trump, Wade Trump, Ed Tabbamor, and Darlyne Tabbamor

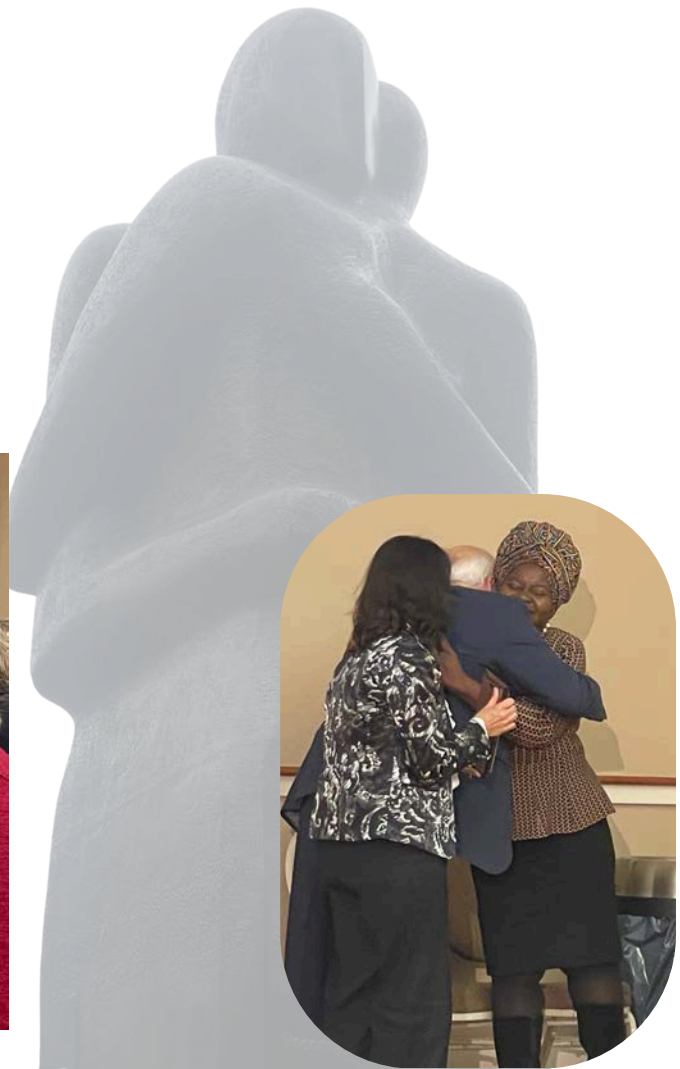


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“True reconciliation is based on forgiveness.”

-Archbishop Desmond Tutu



Who We Are → BRIDGERS OF THE GAP MINISTRIES



Left to Right: Ed Tabbanor (President),
Michelle Tabbanor (Secretary),
and Darlyne Tabbanor (Vice President)

We are a non-profit organization based in Virginia Beach, Virginia. We are committed to breaking down barriers that mentally and socially divide people. At the heart of this ministry, we want to help people to understand their value, acceptance, and placement in the Kingdom of God.

Mission: Through our ministry, we bring people together by building bridges across racial, cultural, economic, educational, generational, religious, and other boundaries.

"...helping people to release the past, and embrace a brighter future through the love of Christ."

Introduction

How did the project begin?

The project began when we learned about England's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade during a colloquium with the Urban Renewal Center at Oxford University in 2023. **We discovered the noteworthy connection between Virginia, England, and Benin, and how they contributed to the history and continuing impact of slavery. Specifically in Hampton Roads, we recognized that this issue must be addressed before it is possible to achieve the Christian unity that we desire and God desires (John 17).**

What is the project?

Much like other efforts toward unity and reconciliation, this project acknowledges the past wrongs that have caused generations of bondage and pain. What makes this project different is that instead of asking for an apology, we will be **offering forgiveness** for the crimes committed by and against our ancestors. It is impossible to get adequate equity or recompense for the horrific injustices of slavery through legislation or with an eye-for-an-eye mentality.

That is why we are going back to the places where the offenses occurred, specifically Richmond, Hampton, Liverpool, Oxford, and Benin - to offer forgiveness and proclaim freedom and unity, in order to pursue justice and peace for all. We are also creating additional opportunities for personal, regional, and global reconciliation.

Why Reconcile?

The Body of Christ must come together in order to fulfill the calling of Christ - "...that they all may be one. Just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, so also may they be one in Us, so the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21). **God places priority on reconciliation, even before offerings** - "...First be reconciled to your brother, then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:24).

Why does it matter now?

Christ-centered unity is crucial for healing. Hampton Roads has been the birthplace of many significant events in our nation, and still serves as a prototype for the United States in many ways. That is why unity and reconciliation need to happen here and now.

Forgiveness is not forgiveness when atonement has been made. That's simply payment of a debt. Forgiveness comes when a person cannot or does not pay the debt.

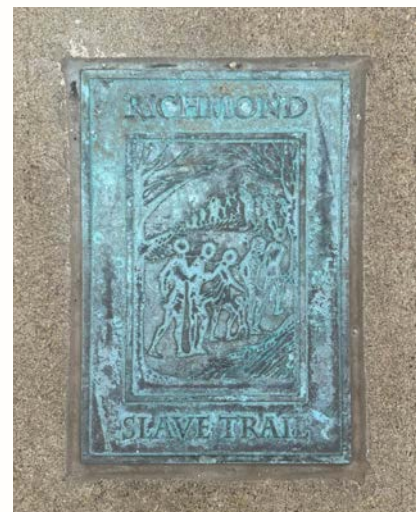
→ The Wings of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a concept that we learn about as young children, but can be difficult to put into practice throughout our lives. To forgive is to “give up resentment of or claim to requital.”¹ It is a conscious and intentional decision to release feelings of vengeance toward one who has caused harm, regardless of the forgiveness being deserved or not.²

Some philosophers have reduced the act of forgiveness to a mere strategy used to manipulate one’s self from feeling destructive emotions - a defense mechanism. On the contrary, in no way does forgiveness diminish the gravity of the offense, nor does it mean it is wholly forgotten. **Genuine** forgiveness requires a change in perspective that causes the forgiver to forgo a claim to legitimate resentment and acquit the offense without compromise or dilution.³

RESENTMENT IS DESERVED, BUT GRACE IS GIVEN.

Ultimately, reconciliation is possible through healing psychological, physiological, and emotional wounds that have been incurred. Healing also reduces the likelihood of victims passing their pain to others - hurt people hurting people. The most important step toward reconciliation is to forgive members of the perpetrator group, even if they themselves never participated in, or planned, the hostile act. True reconciliation can occur when people heal through apology and forgiveness.⁴



¹ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Forgive (verb),” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forgive>.

² “Forgiveness Defined,” *Greater Good Magazine*, <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness/definition#what-is-forgiveness>.

³ Hieronymi “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2001.tb00073.x>.

⁴ Staub et al., “Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving, and the Prevention of Violence After Genocide or Mass Killing,” 2005, https://people.umass.edu/estaub/healing_reconciliation_forgiving.pdf.

The Key



Through our own acts of forgiveness, we can be a catalyst for healing and serve as a model to ignite a desire in others to move forward in the healing process. We are offering forgiveness to facilitate the healing process and move toward peace and unity within ourselves, as a region, and eventually, as a nation. This process also includes affecting positive changes in our present-day communities, cities, states, and the nation, to bring equality and justice for all.

Phases of the Project

Our project consists of four overlapping phases:

Phase
01

RELATIONSHIP - HAMPTON ROADS

Our goal in this phase is to begin the process of unifying Hampton Roads through reconciliatory relationships and collaborations.

Phase
02

RESOLUTION - RICHMOND, ENGLAND, & BENIN

Our goal in this phase is to proclaim forgiveness in specific international lands that participated in the transatlantic slave trade and contributed to generational harm in Hampton Roads.

Phase
03

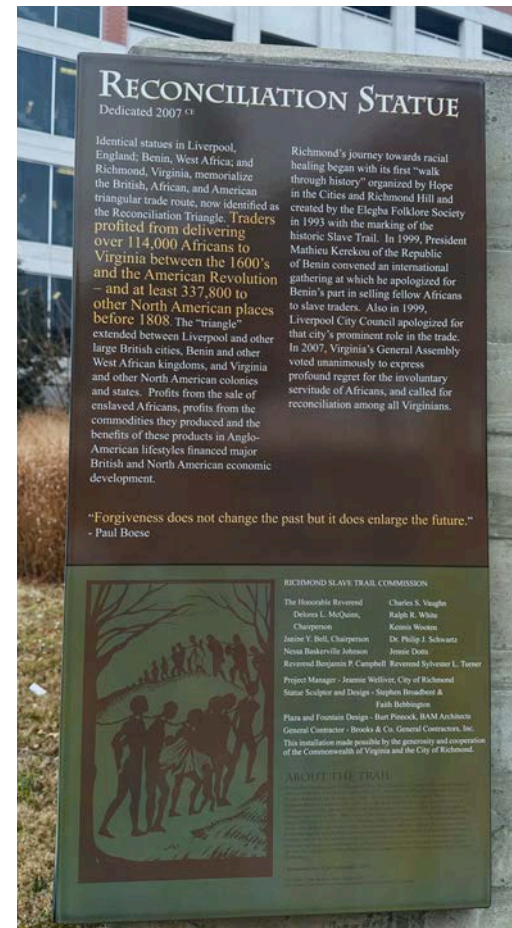
RECLAIMING - BENIN

Our goal in this phase is to return to the land from which our ancestors were sold into slavery, representing them and their generations, to reverse the affliction of bondage and reclaim our dignity and heritage.

Phase
04

RESTORATION - HAMPTON ROADS

Our goal in this phase is to continue the work of unifying Hampton Roads. As we enter into a new season of victory and cohesion, we will facilitate the forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation work that needs to be done.



Phase 1: Relationship

Unity in diversity

Unity in diversity

Since the Hampton Roads area is the birthplace of our nation, we believe it is significant and necessary to take into account the impact of our area, even today. We are focusing on unity in Hampton Roads and facilitating collaborative relationships amongst people groups. It is in this effort that we continue to develop opportunities to unite people across generations, faith backgrounds, races, and cultures.

→ “The Blessing” Hampton Roads Virtual Choir

One of the ways that we have done this is to begin production of a virtual choir version of “The Blessing.” We believe that it is important to send a blessing from our area. In the video, we will be highlighting a range of notable features of our area, including Cape Henry (the site of the first English settlers landing dedicated to God on April 26, 1607).⁵

Our goal is to enlist at least 100 churches **from every part of the Body of Christ** in Hampton Roads, to form a virtual video choir to offer a unique and beautiful blessing from our region. **Our communities need to know that God is for them.** As believers in Christ, especially at this time, we need to proclaim the Blessing of God over our communities, our nation, and our world.



→ Teacher Gift Distributions

We have partnered with the Let’s Make a Difference Coalition of Norfolk, VA to provide monthly birthday gifts for teachers who work in the 23504 zip code of Norfolk. This project is part of a larger effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline in the area, and to promote appreciation for the hard work of teachers in serving students and their families. *(Pictured below)*

→ Prayer Ministry

We participate in three separate prayer groups on behalf of the Hampton Roads area. Bridgers of the Gap meets two mornings a week to pray over members of the community and address specific prayer needs. We also pray weekly with a group of Hampton Roads Christian leaders to intercede for and bless the whole region. Lastly, we pray weekly with the Virginia Cities Movement Team, a collective of Christian pastors and leaders across the Tidewater region.

⁵ “General Information,” *First Landing State Park*, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/first-landing#general_information

Phase 2: Resolution

Forgiveness is a decision

For this phase, we are offering forgiveness for the wrongdoings of slavery from the place where the first slaves landed in present day United States. This involves visiting Richmond, Liverpool, Oxford, and Benin, to make a proclamation of forgiveness for the sins against our ancestors, closing the circuit of apology and forgiveness.

Scholars hold different perspectives about the effectiveness of proclamations of apology. Within this debate, criteria exist for what constitutes an effective movement to redress past wrongs, including generating political pressure to evoke a response. However, political pressure and obligation can raise the question of the sincerity and validity of apologies and redress.⁶ Nonetheless, they are a starting point toward reconciliation.

Public proclamations of apology have been made in more recent years, by the UK, Benin,⁷ and the United States,⁸ including the Commonwealth of Virginia as the first state to pass a resolution.⁹ However, we have found only one official proclamation of forgiveness from the ancestors of the transatlantic slave trade to date.

In February 1999 in Washington, D.C., President Matthieu Kerekou of Benin knelt before Bishop David Perrin and offered a formal apology for his country's part in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Bishop Perrin responded with this statement of forgiveness:

“
“You ask me to forgive you and your ancestors for having put us in a position where we had to experience only the ‘second best’ in everything?” he began.
“You ask us to forgive you for everything that has been done to us for all these years because of the color of our skin?”
“Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ and because of our faith in His finished work, we forgive it all!”¹⁰

⁶ Brooks, When Sorry Isn't Enough.

⁷ “Reconciliation Triangle,” *Broadbent Studio*, <https://broadbent.studio/reconciliation-triangle-casestudy>.

⁸ Thompson, “Senate Unanimously Approves Resolution Apologizing for Slavery,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/18/AR2009061803877.html>

⁹ O'Dell, “Virginia Apologizes for Role in Slavery,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/25/AR2007022500470.html>

¹⁰ Gaines, *My Brothers Keeper*.

→ Phase 2: Resolution

Reconciliation Triangle

Public acknowledgement and apologies have been offered for the atrocities imposed on the Africans of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. For example, the three Reconciliation Statues stand as a collective 'Reconciliation Triangle' linking Liverpool (UK) Benin (West Africa) and Richmond (US) as an apologetic acknowledgement of the wrongs enacted upon African slaves in those places.

In 1998, Richmond's then-mayor, Tim Kaine, issued a formal apology, and in 1999, Liverpool City Council made a similar apology as well. In 1999-2000, the President of Benin, made an International visit to several locations making a formal apology for the role Benin played in selling fellow Africans into slavery.

These types of initiatives bring together the perspectives of the victimized and their perpetrators, and crosses national and generational boundaries. This nurtures forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and cooperation toward a future of justice and peace. **We are traveling to each of these statues to offer a formal declaration of forgiveness in response to the apologies made.**⁷



Statue in Liverpool



*Statue
Unveiling
Ceremony in
Benin*



Statue in Richmond

⁷ "Reconciliation Triangle," *Broadbent Studio*, <https://broadbent.studio/reconciliation-triangle-casestudy>.

PHASE 2: WHY OXFORD?

To build a bridge of blessing and repentance
from one birthplace to another.

To continue the work that Bridgers of the Gap has been doing to bring blessing and unity to Hampton Roads, we are traveling back to one of the birthplaces of a damage that wounded the western world.

The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world, and it holds a long, complex history with the church and the issue of human rights. The Transatlantic Slave Trade (the worst and longest-lasting slavery in history) was often supported by theological justifications to uphold a corrupt social order – with multiple religious ministers in Oxford owning slaves themselves.¹¹

We believe that it is not only fitting, but necessary to go back to the origin of this damage and to repair the breach from the first landing place of our nation and the place of the first African slaves in the United States. We are going to Oxford to have critical conversations about the need for the reconciliation process in order to bring healing.

Our goal is to represent Hampton Roads in Oxford.

Our work in Oxford is a physical representation of the healing work of reconciliation for the wounds of slavery going back to the first slaves brought to Old Point Comfort (present day Hampton, Virginia).¹²

Our goal is to represent Hampton Roads in Oxford and present a proclamation of forgiveness from our region to another primary area from which the offense came.



March 23, 2023, Oxford Colloquium Certificate Ceremony

¹¹ Legacies of British slavery. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

¹² "The 1619 Landing." *Hampton History Museum*. <https://www.hampton.gov/3580/The-1619-Landing-Report-FAQs>

Phase 3: Reclaim

Redeeming lost identity

This phase of the project is a statement of reclaiming dignity and heritage by returning through passageways where our African ancestors were sold into slavery. We will be walking back through the “Door of No Return” in Ouidah, Benin, in homage to our personal heritage and reversing the direction of the original offense.

The “Doors of No Return” were erected in multiple African countries as monuments to recognize the path traveled by those who were sold during the transatlantic slave trade. The archway in Benin, built in 1995 as a part of the Slave Trade Route project, depicts enslaved slaves marching toward the water suggesting that they would never return.¹³

**We are reversing the curse of stolen identity
with our own symbolic and spiritual gesture.**

As the program continues to develop, we plan to partner with organizations, foundations, and governments in Africa wherever a “Door of No Return” stands. The intention is to connect African-Americans to their ethnic roots, and facilitate their own pilgrimages to walk back through a door relative to their families’ histories. They will receive certificates acknowledging their adoption into native tribes, and their names will be added to a “Wall of Reclamation,” which will be erected in their honor through this program.

¹³ Dunnell, “La Porte du Non-Retour (The Door of No Return),” *Legacies of British slavery*. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>



Moving toward forgiveness

Phase 4: Restoration

Moving toward forgiveness



As much as we would like to agree with the old adage that *time heals all wounds*, that is unfortunately not the case. Even in 2025, we still see issues of racism, hatred, and victimization in our communities. Now, more than ever, we must unify as the Body of Christ and model what reconciliation can look like in America.

Historically, there was a distinction between the slavery era and Jim Crow era, both impacting race relations today in different ways. Although it was abhorrently unjust, slavery was embedded into culture to the extent that it was normalized. Black slaves incurred the offense that carried into Black American culture. The Jim Crow era was birthed out of retaliation by White Americans due to the emancipation of slaves. Offense was bred partially because their dominant workforce had been freed. This led to a caveat in 13th Amendment, through which we still see a form of slavery exemplified in our prison system today.¹⁴

While these are difficult truths to discuss, it is imperative that we engage in conversations that get to the root of the issues in order to move toward a brighter future – one where we can truly forgive perpetrators of offense and move together in unity toward a future where *liberty and justice for all* is not just a cliché.

That is the precise reason we are traveling from Hampton Roads to each statue of the Reconciliation Triangle, to offer forgiveness and bridge a gap between the places where the offenses originated and Hampton Roads, where slavery landed in America. **It closes the circuit of apology and forgiveness in order to move forward with unified strength so we can live into reconciliation and unity.**

¹⁴ 13th, DuVernay, Netflix.

Moving toward reconciliation

→ Restoration

Moving toward reconciliation

Adding to the efforts that we have already been doing, we will facilitate **“Crucial Conversations,”** table-talk forums to discuss important topics that explore critical issues. This is important because these types of discussions can contribute significantly to collective understanding, which can be used constructively to shift perspectives.¹

Additionally, we will hold interracial, intergenerational, and interdenominational **collective worship** and other **collaborative events**. This will include a **Pastors’ Prayer Summit** and a **Church Partnership Program**, where churches will partner in diverse pairings for one year as a statement of unity for the region. These will be opportunities for the Body of Christ in Hampton Roads to work together to advance the Kingdom of God and build authentic relationships as believers.

Reconciliation is not the absence of conflict, but the unifying spirit of God’s love, even in the midst of conflicting viewpoints. Our goal is to unite people in a genuine collaborative effort to have a reconciliatory relationship, as God came to earth to reconcile mankind to Himself.

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

-2 Corinthians 5:18-20

¹ Staub et al., “Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving, and the Prevention of Violence After Genocide or Mass Killing,” 2005, https://people.umass.edu/estaub/healing_reconciliation_forgiving.pdf.

Pictured: Ron Atkinson, Bob Fox, Vicki Mitchell, Darlyne Tabbanor, Antipas Harris, and Ed Tabbanor.



→ A Founder's Message

I feel that our reconciliation project will help to unite Christians in Hampton Roads, the place where slavery and the United States began, and that collaboration will ignite a spark of unity that will affect our nation and heal our land.

I believe that, by addressing the racial issues and tensions here in Hampton Roads, we will begin to eradicate the atmospheric disunity among peoples. Starting with the healing process and reconciliation in our own area, we will also catalyze the movement of our entire nation towards healing and racial reconciliation as well. It was broken here. It gets fixed here.

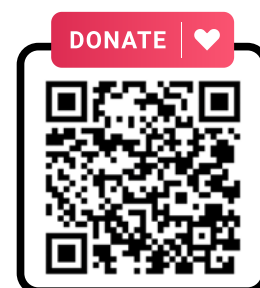
This project has come full circle for our family. In December 1999, Jack Gaines took a delegation of African-Americans to Benin, Africa because the president of Benin had personally expressed to him a desire to formally apologize and ask forgiveness for his country's part in the slave trade. Jack Gaines is my relative by marriage, myself being grafted into a blended family.

I believe that God has called our family to complete the circle by traveling to each of the Reconciliation Statues and offering a formal declaration of forgiveness from the people of Hampton Roads, specifically the descendants of the slaves, and others affected by slavery. This is in response to the apologies that have been made at each of the Reconciliation Statues. With apologies and forgiveness being formally presented, the path to healing and reconciliation is laid open.

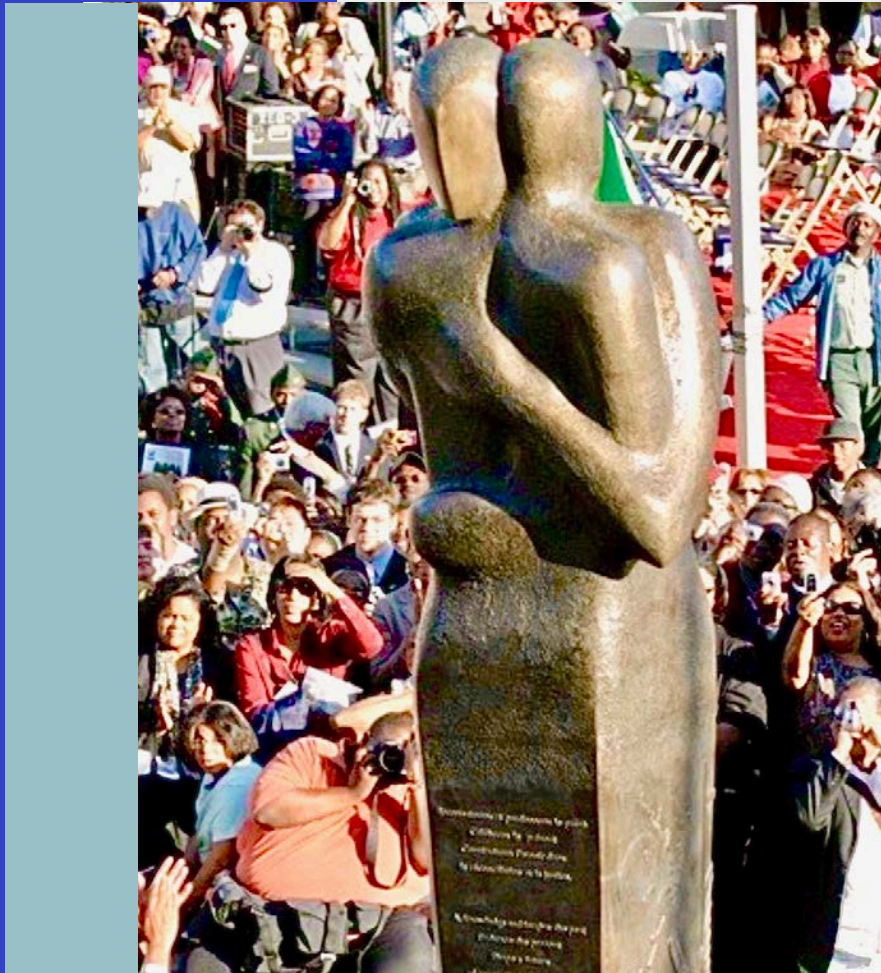
Darlyne Tabbanor
Vice President, Bridgers of the Gap Ministries

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation toward our project, please scan the QR code or contact us for more ways to give.

Your generous gift of any amount goes a long way. May God bless you as you!



info@bridgersofthegap.org



**Thank you
for all of
your
prayers
and
support!**

