

New Documentary Highlights Racial Reconciliation Journey in Sanford, Fla.

A new documentary, *Sanford: the Untold Story*, highlighting the racial reconciliation journey being experienced in the historic city of Sanford, Fla., following the tragic death of **Trayvon Martin** last February, is being aired nationwide and released on YouTube around Labor Day weekend.

In this 30-minute film, Charisma Media founder and program host Steve Strang reveals how local pastors—including black, Hispanic and Caucasian—have taken the lead to confront the racial divide that spans generations in their city by regularly meeting, sharing and praying together.

“I was genuinely moved to see how these pastors have passionately stood together and are now reaching out to help hurting people,” Strang said. “Their story will inspire audiences across the country to initiate a similar approach in their communities—because racism isn’t limited to Sanford, Fla.”

Strang, a 30-year resident of central Florida, whose office is located only 2.3 miles from the site of the killing, knew of the deep-seated racial tensions that have divided the region since the days of segregation. He cited the 1947 incident when city officials refused to let Jackie Robinson’s Minor League team hold spring training because he was black, one year before he broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. But he was as surprised as anyone when that came to a boiling point following Martin’s death, as national activist leaders arrived in Sanford and the New Black Panthers called for violence in the streets.

"There has to be divine alignment in the church bringing healing in the community," said Paul Benjamin, pastor of the Central Florida Dream Center in Sanford. "We need to bring reconciliation and healing, and that starts with forgiveness."

Two national leaders, Raleigh Washington, president and CEO of Promise Keepers, and Bishop Harry Jackson, founder of High Impact Ministries in Washington, D.C., came to see how they could help. They suggested gathering local pastors of every denomination, and within hours came together to pray.

"**Racism** is not a black or white thing, it is a human thing," Bishop Jackson said, reinforcing, as evangelist Billy Graham identified when asked by a reporter several years ago, racism as the greatest social problem in the world today.

"I really believe that bringing together pastors and leaders in Sanford was a powerfully positive thing," Washington said. "Individuals from across races and denominations came together all for one purpose—to speak as one for the community and embrace one another—something which is now continually happening."

Derrick Gay, pastor of Dominion International Church of Sanford, told the group, "We have an obligation and a responsibility to stand up as the church and do what we've been assigned to do, which is to lead the way—not wait for the media or politicians to tell us what to do."

In response, Washington challenged, "The faith community must control the rhetoric as representatives of the Sanford community. The cry for justice is going to divide us when a verdict is delivered. There will not be agreement on what justice is. The base cry must be for righteousness, which comes from God and changes hearts."

Pastor Benjamin opined that there is a time when “silence is golden,” and a time when silence is just plain yellow. “Sanford is a microcosm of what is going on nationally,” he said. “That is why God has given us a national platform to speak.”

In conjunction with a special issue of *Charisma* magazine focusing on “The Church’s Response to Racism” released in June, the documentary *Sanford: The Untold Story*, produced by Charisma Media’s nonprofit partner Christian Life Missions, will air nationwide beginning Sept. 2 and is available on DVD for a \$30 donation.

“This case has stirred a great deal of tension and obviously brought to light the issues of race in America that are often simmering just below the surface of our culture,” Strang said. “Still, there is a deeper, more personal story of hope that needs to be told. As this polarization becomes seemingly more heated and complex than perhaps ever before, it seems the Church remains the only hope for societal renewal and personal reconciliation.

“Our purpose in producing this program is to share the story about the catalytic role of pastors and Christians in Sanford who have come together to promote healing and forgiveness in this community,” Strang continued. “Blacks and whites are meeting together and getting the issues out in the open and praying for one another, and they are bringing unity among the races here. We want the whole nation to hear about what they are doing, and consider the potential for this to become a movement across the country.”

Local listings and show times for *Sanford: The Untold Story* are accessible at and include:

- Sunday, Sept. 2 at 4 p.m. EST on WAXC-TV Super Channel 55 in Leesburg/Orlando, Fla.

- Monday, Sept. 3 at 7:30 p.m. EST on WAXC-TV Super Channel 55 in Leesburg/Orlando, Fla.
- Tuesday, Sept. 4 at 2:30 p.m. EST on Daystar Television Network
- Saturday, Sept. 8 at 1 p.m. EST on The Word Network

More information is available online at [www.daystar.com](#) or at [www.thewordnetwork.com](#).