

Talking about Trayvon at church

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

July 24, 2013

On Sunday I visited a church that's majority white but not overwhelmingly so. After worship, I stuck around for a planned conversation about Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman. Here the demographics were flipped: a slight majority of African Americans.

But the white folks did their share of the talking. Some of them seemed to want to limit the conversation to the proceedings of this particular court case, despite the pastor's invitation to express feelings on related issues. They did listen patiently, for the most part, as black congregants described their own experiences of being harrassed by the police, of having [the talk](#) with their sons, of feeling a constant pressure to be better than good. But then it was their turn, and they brought things back to the self-defense laws in question and the fact that the jurors were privy to more information than the rest of us.

I was impressed that the church was having the conversation. Not so much with the way some white congregants engaged it. It seemed like they were listening but not really hearing the depth of hurt and fear that others were expressing.

This week we learned just how sharp the division is between white and black views on the Zimmerman verdict. [NPR summarizes](#):

According to a [Pew Research Center poll](#), 86 percent of African-Americans expressed dissatisfaction with the verdict, compared with just 30 percent of whites. A [Washington Post/ABC News poll](#) reported a similar finding: Just 9 percent of blacks approved of acquitting George Zimmerman of criminal charges in Martin's death, compared with 51 percent of whites who approved.

The *Post*/ABC News data also reported that 87 percent of blacks say the shooting was unjustified. Just 33 percent of whites agreed.

Clearly, black and white Americans see very different stories here. Perhaps, as we are so often told, what's needed is more conversation. If so, those of us who have always been perceived as not potential bad guys but presumptive good ones have a

clear role in that conversation: to sit and listen.