



In Remembrance of the Emanuel-9 June 17, 2015 Charleston church shooting

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Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church



Charleston church shooting (also known as the **Charleston church massacre** was a mass shooting and hate crime in which white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine African Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, United States, on the evening of June 17, 2015. Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist, killed nine people (including the senior pastor, state senator Clementa C. Pinckney) during a prayer service. Three other victims survived. The morning after the attack, police arrested Roof in Shelby, North Carolina. Roof confessed to committing the shooting in the hope of igniting a race war. The shooting targeted one of the United States' oldest black churches, which has long been a site for community organization around civil rights.

Roof was found competent to stand trial in federal court, and in December 2016 was convicted of 33 federal hate crime and murder charges stemming from the shooting. On January 10, 2017, he was sentenced to death. Roof was separately charged with nine counts of murder in the South Carolina state courts. In April 2017, Roof pleaded guilty to all nine state charges in order to avoid a second death sentence and was sentenced to life imprisonment for each, clearing the way for his eventual federal execution.

Roof espoused racial hatred in both a website manifesto published before the shooting, and a journal written from jail afterwards. Photographs posted on the website showed Roof posing with emblems associated with white supremacy and with photos of the Confederate battle flag. The shooting triggered debate on its modern display, and following the shooting, the South Carolina General Assembly voted to remove the flag from State Capitol grounds.

After waiting for the other participants to begin praying, he stood up and pulled a gun from a fanny pack, aiming it at 87-year-old Susie Jackson. Jackson's nephew, 26-year-old Tywanza Sanders, tried to talk him down and asked him why he was attacking churchgoers. The shooter responded, "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go." When he expressed his intention to shoot everyone, Sanders dove in front of Jackson and was shot first. The suspect then shot the other victims, all the while shouting racial epithets. He also reportedly said, "Y'all want something to pray about? I'll give you something to pray about." He reloaded his gun five times. Sanders' mother and his five-year-old niece, both attending the study, survived the shooting by pretending to be dead.

Dot Scott, president of the local branch of the NAACP, said she had heard from victims' relatives that the shooter spared one woman (Sanders' mother) so she could, according to him, tell other people what happened. He asked her, "Did I shoot you?" She replied, "No." Then, he said, "Good, 'cause we need someone to survive, because I'm gonna shoot myself, and you'll be the only survivor." According to the son of one of the victims, who spoke to that survivor, the shooter allegedly turned the gun to his own head and pulled the trigger, but only then discovered he was out of ammunition. Before leaving the church, he reportedly "uttered a racially inflammatory statement" over the victims' bodies. The entire shooting lasted for approximately six minutes.

Several hours later, a bomb threat was called into the Courtyard by Marriott hotel on Calhoun Street, complicating the investigation and prompting an evacuation of the immediate area.

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Until surpassed by the 2017 Sutherland Springs church shooting, this was the largest mass shooting at an American place of worship, alongside a 1991 attack at a Buddhist temple in Waddell, Arizona.

Background

The 203-year-old church has played an important role in the history of South Carolina, including the slavery era, the civil rights movement, and the Black Lives Matter. The church was founded in 1816 and it is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, often referred to as "Mother Emanuel". It is the oldest historically black congregation south of Baltimore. When one of the church's co-founders, Denmark Vesey, was suspected of planning a slave rebellion in Charleston in 1822, 35 people, including Vesey, were hanged and the church was burned down. Charleston citizens accepted the claim that a slave rebellion was to begin at the stroke of midnight on June 16, 1822, and to erupt the following day; the shooting in 2015 occurred on the 193rd anniversary of the thwarted uprising. The rebuilt church was formally shuttered with other all-black congregations by the city in 1834, meeting in secret until 1865 when it was formally reorganized, acquired the name Emanuel ("God with us") and rebuilt upon a design by Denmark Vesey's son. That structure was badly damaged in the 1886 Charleston earthquake. The current building dates from 1891.

The church's senior pastor, the Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, had held rallies after the shooting of Walter Scott by a white police officer two months earlier, in nearby North Charleston, and as a state senator, Pinckney pushed for legislation requiring police to wear body cameras. Several observers noted a similarity between the massacre at Emanuel AME and the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing of a politically active African-

American church in Birmingham, Alabama, where the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) killed four black girls and injured fourteen others, an attack that galvanized the civil rights movement.

A number of scholars, journalists, activists and politicians have emphasized the need to understand the attack in the broader context of racism in the United States, rather than seeing it as an isolated event of racially motivated violence. In 1996, Congress passed the Church Arson Prevention Act, making it a federal crime to damage religious property because of its "racial or ethnic character", in response to a spate of 154 suspicious church burnings since 1991. More recent arson attacks against black churches included a black church in Massachusetts that was burned down the day after the first inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009.

Shooting

At around 9:05 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, the Charleston Police Department began receiving calls of a shooting at Emanuel AME Church. A man described as white, with sandy-blond hair, around 21 years old and 5 feet 9 inches (175 cm) in height, wearing a gray sweatshirt and jeans, opened fire with a Glock 41 .45-caliber handgun on a group of people inside the church at a Bible study attended by Pinckney. The shooter then fled the scene. He had been carrying eight magazines holding hollow-point bullets.

During the hour preceding the attack, 13 people including the shooter participated in the Bible study. According to the accounts of people who talked to survivors, when the shooter walked into the historic African-American church, he immediately asked for Pinckney and sat down next to him, initially listening to others during the study. He started to disagree when they began discussing Scripture. Eventually,

I forgive you.’ Relatives of Charleston church shooting victims address Dylann Roof:

2015 shooting at historic African American church in South Carolina

Roof was arrested Thursday morning in North Carolina after a florist saw him in his car and called police. On Friday morning, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley called the shooting spree “an absolute hate crime” and called on prosecutors to seek the death penalty. Roof is being held at the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention.

The relatives of people slain inside the historic African American church in Charleston, S.C., earlier this week were able to speak directly to the accused gunman Friday at his first court appearance.

[In their words: The powerful messages of forgiveness delivered by the relatives:

One by one, those who chose to speak at a bond hearing did not turn to anger. Instead, while he remained impassive, they offered him forgiveness and said they were praying for his soul, even as they described the pain of their losses.

“I forgive you,” Nadine Collier, the daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance, said at the hearing, her voice breaking with emotion. “You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her again. I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul.”

The bond hearing in North Charleston was the first public appearance of Dylann Roof, the 21-year-old arrested in connection with the shootings, since police booked him into a Charleston County detention center and said he was charged with nine counts of murder.

Roof appeared at the bond hearing in a video feed from the Al Cannon Detention Center in North Charleston, S.C.

Victims:

The dead, six women and three men, were all Methodist African Americans. Eight died at the scene; the ninth, Daniel Simmons, died at MUSC Medical Center. They were all killed by multiple gunshots fired at close range. Five individuals survived the shooting unharmed, including Felicia Sanders, mother of slain victim Tywanza Sanders, and her five-year-old granddaughter, along with Polly Sheppard, a Bible study member. Pinckney's wife and daughter were also inside the building during the shooting. Those killed were identified as:

- Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54) – Bible study member and manager for the Charleston County Public Library system; sister of politician and former state senator Malcolm Graham.
- Susie Jackson (87) – a Bible study and church choir member.
- Ethel Lee Lance (70) – the church's sexton.
- Depayne Middleton-Doctor (49) – a pastor who was also employed as a school administrator and admissions coordinator at Southern Wesleyan University.
- Clementa C. Pinckney (41) – the church's pastor and a South Carolina state senator.
- Tywanza Sanders (26) – a Bible study member; grandnephew of victim Susie Jackson.
- Daniel Simmons (74) – a pastor who also served at Greater Zion AME Church in Awendaw.
- Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45) – a pastor; also a speech therapist and track coach at Goose Creek High School; mother of MLB prospect Chris Singleton.
- Myra Thompson (59) – a Bible study teacher.

The victims were later collectively referred to as "The Charleston Nine" and "The Emanuel Nine".

Background of the church:

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The Prayer of Thanksgiving: Let us pray this prayer together...

Eternal God, we pause to give you thanks for the victims and the survivors of the Emanuel 9 shooting. We rejoice today because through this tragic experience, we are reminded that evil and hatred does not have the last say, but that love overcomes all fear and that your grace, comfort us through times of pain and sorrow. We pray that the legacy of the Emanuel 9 will continue to live through us and that in these times of injustice we will remind the world of your justice. We pray that in these times of heighten fear that we remind the world of your steadfast love for all of your children. We pray that in these times of indecisiveness that we remind the world of good it is when God's children dwell together in unity. Make us your light in the darkness of this world so that all will come into the knowledge of your love through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The written Word: 1 Corinthians 15:50-57



⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer of Healing:

God, we come before you with faith in your promise that whatever we ask for in your name will be granted to us. We come trusting in your great love for us and believing that you know all that we are in need of. God we pray that you will bring healing to us as we continue to uplift the legacies of the Emanuel 9 and the survivors. Bring your healing love into every corner of our hearts and release all the buried and unhealed hurts, pain, and anger that we may harbor within us. Heal all feeling sadness, loneliness, fear and anxiety. Heal all feeling guilt, despair, feelings of betrayal and rejection. Heal all feelings of anger, hatred, resentment and bitterness. God our trust is in you. Lead us and guide us. Inspire and strengthen us. Teach us how to forgive and how to be forgiven in healthy and healing ways. Always remind us that love conquers even the most senseless acts of violence and hatred. And then Lord, empower us to be witnesses of your healing power and bring glory, honor and praise to your name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

