

ACLC remembers murder of 9 AME church members in Church Charleston, SC

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Friday, June 17, 2016 marked the first anniversary of the murder of nine members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina, during their weekly Bible Study. Among those slain was State Senator Clementa C. Pinckney, pastor of Emanuel AME.

On the morning of the anniversary, clergy affiliated with the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) supported a Press Announcement and Prayer in Harlem, led by the Concerned Clergy of New York, in remembrance of the victims of the tragedy.

The announcement and prayer were held on the street in front of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The Rev. Dr. Luonne Abram Rouse, pastor of the United Methodist Church of Huntington-Cold Spring Harbor, New York, announced a nine-day prayer for peace and reconciliation in memory of the "Emanuel Nine." The nine-day prayer will conclude with a memorial service at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston on Friday, June 24.



"Love must overcome hatred," Dr. Rouse said. "Through prayer and strengthening our relationship with God we all will win." Dr. Rouse confided that he knows all too well about the racism that was at the core of the senseless killing at Emanuel. He also knows the process of overcoming this scourge. In 1986, Dr. Rouse became the first African-American United Methodist Pastor of a predominately white congregation

in South Carolina. He knows from experience that prayer, trust in God, and love can win over hatred and division.

He asked all to pray “during these next nine days leading up to the memorial at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina on Friday, June 24, 2016.”

A second speaker was Ambassador Suzan Johnson “Sujay” Cook. Rev. Dr. Cook was formerly a presidential adviser to President Bill Clinton and served as the ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom for President Barack Obama. Dr. Cook began her remarks by mentioning that her prayers go out to those recently killed in Orlando, Florida, to their families and to the LGBT community.

As former ambassador for international religious freedom, Dr. Cook commented that she knows well the struggles that people face throughout the world. She believes that all religions must come together in love and in respect of one another to address these struggles.

Dr. Cook is also personally connected to Emanuel AME. She personally knew and deeply respected Rev. Dr. Clementa C. Pinckney. She is also a good friend of the new pastor at Emanuel AME, the Rev. Dr. Betty Deas Clark. Dr. Cook reflected on how Emanuel AME is a church known for its hospitality, and recalled how they even welcomed the crazed young man into their Bible study. She also noted how the horrific shootings brought the church and community together in oneness in spite of the tragedy. In memory of the Emanuel Nine, Dr. Cook called out the names and ages of each of the deceased, and offered her best wishes to Dr. Clark and the Emanuel congregation during their journey of healing.

Finally, Rev. Dr. Michael Jenkins, chairman emeritus of the ACLC, gave a moving reflection on the deep faith and love of the people of Charleston. He spoke about how their incredible act of forgiveness is a dynamic example of how to overcome racial hatred and division. Instead of playing into the hopes of the killer, who sought to stir up further racial tension and division, commented Dr. Jenkins, the people of Charleston chose to put faith in a loving and forgiving God as their weapon for healing after a tragic loss.

Dr. Jenkins also noted by way of comparison that the events in Ferguson and Baltimore perhaps turned violent because people tried to address real problems without faith. This was very different from the response in Charleston, where members of the victims’ families applied Jesus’ teachings of love and forgiveness, knowing that the judgment of the guilty is ultimately in God’s hands. It was this demonstration of faith and forgiveness, reflected Dr. Jenkins, that stirred the churches in Charleston to come together in the spirit of the Lord so that the terrible tragedy did not lead to burning buildings but to hearts coming together to fight against evil with the power of love and unity.

To conclude the event, the Reverend Juanita Pierre-Louis, pastor of the Harlem Family Church, gave a warm and comforting prayer.

All are invited to support the ongoing nine days of prayer and to attend the memorial service at Emanuel AME on Friday, June 24, 2016.

