

A Prayer for Emanuel AME Church

They had Bible study last night at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in the same room where the shootings occurred a week earlier. The funerals begin today. Nine lives were taken by racism turned violent, as it often does. The media have covered the tragedy from every possible angle. No analysis proves adequate. Mother Emanuel was born because of exclusion and racism, and nine of its members died because they included a stranger of another race.



Preachers and politicians and protesters call for action, but no action will redeem tragic deaths or bring dear lives back. As the funerals begin, groanings will be poured out like water, and watery tears will bear witness to grief that has hope.

The African American presidents and deans of ATS member schools have given voice to this moment for the community of theological schools. Their wounded words invite us all to prayer:

“As the African American presidents and deans of graduate theological education, we express our profound solidarity with the families and the faithful of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. There are not words enough to convey the emotions we feel in the aftermath of the blood-bath. Nine people of faith welcomed the proverbial stranger into the house of prayer. Nine of God’s children subsequently lost their lives. Nine women and men were unceremoniously taken from their loved ones. Nine cherished members of a historic freedom-loving congregation and community are no longer in our midst. Our hearts are heavy and we grieve.

“Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood the land of his birth well, better even than most of us today, describing ours as a ‘sick nation.’ At the funeral of four little girls killed by the bigot’s bomb in Birmingham in 1963, he famously made reference to ‘the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism.’ A nation that was born in violence continues to harbor violence still. Searing hate is all too often manifested in hearts and minds only to be transmitted from generation to generation. Domestic terror is no respecter of race, ethnicity, gender, or faith as churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples are time and again defiled. Divisions born of greed and fear rend the nation and tear our very souls apart.

“In the midst of unfathomable horror, we yet and still proclaim our faith. Out of our deepest pain, we embrace all who know agony, sorrow, rage, and grief. As a community of scholars, administrators, and faith leaders, we commit our calling and our lives to the building of a more just and beloved community. Freedom is never free. God grant us the courage to change the things we cannot accept! May we always remember and never forget.”