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As the media around this nation tells the story of last night's tragedy in Charleston, we are shocked and disturbed to hear that an armed young man entered the Emanuel AME Church in downtown Charleston and after sitting with church members for an hour, opened fire, killing nine individuals and wounding one more during their weekly Bible study. Lost in this tragedy was my friend and the Emmanuel AME pastor, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who served admirably in the South Carolina senate.

All of the details of this tragedy are not yet known. As a people of faith committed to social justice and opposed to gun violence and racism, we grieve the lives lost and destroyed by this horrendous act of violence. I ask each of you to pray for the families of those killed, for the wounded, the witnesses, and for the whole congregation of Emmanuel AME Church. The reality is that no one is unaffected. We are all impacted by the horror that occurred in this place of worship.

On June 3, 2015, a Wednesday night, I worshiped at a prayer service at St. Peter's AME Church in North Charleston. On that evening, I led the gathered community in praying for justice for all because whenever one of us suffers, we all suffer and so without justice for all, there is no justice at all. Although the immediate focus at that time was on the tragedy in North Charleston, the tragedy of gun violence was the larger focus.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to work together in our churches and communities to break down the dividing walls of hostility between individuals and groups in our midst. We are called to stop gun violence, to support respectful discussion and cooperation between all people and to be God's beacons of light in this broken world.

Let us pray individually, and collectively. Praying together for understanding and peace is the pathway to healing. Much prayer is needed in Charleston, in South Carolina, and in our world. My hope is that we will band together as people of faith at this time so that the world may see through us the love of Jesus Christ.