

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR JUNE 20, 2015 5:00 PM

# Pagett: Eight years later, we mourn another Charleston nine



A group of women pray together at a make-shift memorial on the sidewalk in front of Charleston's Emanuel A.M.E. Church on Thursday, the day after a gunman massacred the pastor and eight other people at a prayer meeting. **Stephen B. Morton** - AP



COLUMBIA, SC — Standing on a dark beach in Litchfield on Wednesday morning, I watched as the sun peeked over the horizon illuminating our sky in a breathtaking blend of pink, orange and yellow. I took a picture and uploaded it to Facebook with the caption, "Good morning! It's going to be a great day. :)"

But it wasn't. The day that began with such a picturesque sunrise ended with bloodshed in a historic A.M.E. church in downtown Charleston. Nine innocent people, including the pastor of the church and state senator, Clementa Pinckney, were senselessly gunned down.



James R Pagett Jr **SAMHOLLAND**

In an incredible twist of fate, I had been in Litchfield the last time Charleston lost nine of its citizens — nearly eight years earlier to the day. On June 18, 2007, the heroic firefighters known as the Charleston nine perished in the Super Sofa store fire. And now Charleston will have to bury another nine of its finest.

But these nine weren't serving as first responders; they were serving the Lord.

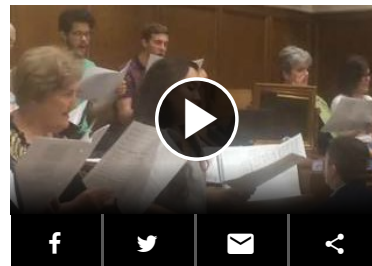
Charleston is affectionately known at the Holy City, not just because of the stately steeples that beautify the skyline but because of the holy people who fill the pews. The innocent victims were attending a Bible study, and they apparently allowed their killer to join them for almost an hour. Despite not knowing him, they chose compassion over suspicion. They chose inclusion over exclusion. They chose love over hate.

The new Charleston nine should be remembered for their devotion to peace, love and an unwavering commitment to their church community.

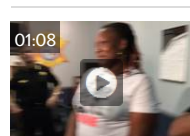
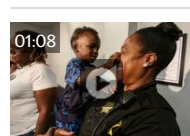
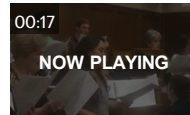
My fraternity brother, state Sen. Sean Bennett, wrote this about his lost colleague, Sen. Pinckney: "Clem was a man of faith, a man who could reach across aisles and divides, a man who cared deeply for the people he represented." In an age of toxic politics and partisan fighting, what a profound loss we have endured. We, as in all South Carolinians.

We are hurting right now because this was an attack on all of us. The famed novelist Pat

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Conroy recently spoke at USC and joked that South Carolina was a cult, not a state. A state is a place on a map that is defined by borders. But South Carolinians — especially Charlestonians — don't need a map to identify who we are. Our love of state flows rapidly through our veins and is embedded deep in our souls.

Charleston has survived earthquakes, fires and hurricanes. The Holy City made it through the Civil War and the civil rights movement with the same grace and class that defines it today. The city is holy because of its people, and because of that, we shall all overcome this tragedy with the strength and dignity that is derived from our faith.

Charleston and South Carolina eventually will heal, but we will never forget. It is my hope — and prayer — that we won't let these fine people die in vain. If our legislators truly want to honor their lost colleague, I would respectfully suggest that they use this tragedy as a catalyst to create policy solutions that address the ridiculous number of guns on our streets and how we handle the mentally ill in our state. Sen. Pinckney and the rest of the Charleston nine deserve nothing less.

JAMES R. PAGETT JR.

COLUMBIA

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