



Dr. Bernard LaFayette Jr
Chairman of the Board

Dr. Charles Steele Jr
President/CEO

Statement from Dr. Charles Steele, Jr., SCLC President and CEO

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Today the SCLC family offers our prayers and condolences to the families and victims of this horrific act in Charleston, South Carolina.

This horrific massacre at an iconic and historic African-American church, where Dr. King once preached. Strikes at the core of the nation's Black community, where prayer and religion are sacred. There has been no violence like this within the Black community since the 16th street Birmingham bombing.

We call upon the people of Charleston to remain calm and vigilant, as the killer is sought, and we all demand that justice be served once he is found.

I am personally saddened by the death of Rev. Clementa Pinckney, pastor of Mother Emmanuel AME Church, who I met while visiting North Charleston, to attend a prayer vigil for Walter Scott (gunned down by a local police officer). Ironically, I was invited by Rev. Pinckney to worship and speak at his church on the theme of non-violence.

This cruel and tragic event should awaken this country to a realization of the madness and culture of hatred and violence that people of color experience daily.

This goes beyond black and white; a climate has been perpetuated in this country that cultivates this type of hatred. This is clearly a crime against humanity and SCLC agrees with the Mayor of Charleston that this is definitely a hate crime.



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As we wait for this demented person to be found, we must honestly acknowledge, and self examine our own lives. Are we just as guilty when we contribute to, but not challenge the popularity of hatred?

It's still not too late for this country to unite in a movement toward peaceful progress before more lives are lost through senseless violence. This is a glaring indictment on our country when people cannot even find safety in the sanctuary, its message is clear, that hatred has gone too far.

It is my intention to return to Mother Emmanuel in the coming days to share again with the Mother Emmanuel Church family and the people of Charleston in worship, to pray in unity with them for peace and justice, and to continue to spread Dr. King's message of non-violence.

On the eve of the SCLC'S national convention in Baton Rouge, next month, SCLC calls upon all of the presidential candidates to speak now on the issue of race turmoil in this country.

For more information, contact the SCLC national office at 404-522-1420.