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At vigil, church leaders urge unity

People of different faiths gather to mourn 9 killed in S.C.

by [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) | June 22, 2015 at 4:40 a.m.

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Visitors to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in North Little Rock join in praise Sunday, singing "Amazing Grace." The gathering, called a prayer vigil of remembrance, was hosted in memory of those killed at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. - Photo by Melissa Gerrits

Let faith communities' biggest problem be finding more chairs, Rabbi Kalman Winnick said Sunday night to the standing-room-only crowd that had gathered at North Little Rock's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to pray for those who were killed in a shooting in Charleston, S.C.



Photo by Melissa Gerrits

Bishop Samuel L. Green Sr. gives the benediction at Bethel AME Church on Sunday in North Little Rock after a gathering was held in memory of those killed at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. Hundreds of community members attended, with standing room only for the two-hour worship and prayer service.

Nine people were shot and killed Wednesday night during a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. Among the dead -- three men and six women, ranging in age from 26 to 87 -- was the pastor of the church, Clementa Pinckney, who was also a South Carolina state senator.

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At Bethel AME Church on Sunday, blacks and whites, Christians and Jews gathered to proclaim that Dylann Storm Roof, 21, the suspected gunman in the Charleston shooting, would not divide their community -- or their faith in God.

Winnick stood at the pulpit, with religious leaders and government officials, including Gov. Asa Hutchinson, sitting behind him, and asked God to be patient with people who have not yet learned how to love.

"We are one human race, one human congregation, one human family," said Winnick.

"We are here for you in your suffering, and we want you to know that your suffering is our suffering."

He added that when people are tried with a "division of color," they need to respond with unity and inclusivity.

Winnick compared the nine people who died to the nine months of pregnancy, a process, he said, that is sometimes painful but ends in a new life and hope for the future.

The idea caused a hum of affirmations among those sitting on the pews inside the small church.

It was a hum that crescendoed.

Attendees sang and asked people to put their faith in God, as a photo slideshow of the nine people who were shot and killed played in the background.

The names of the nine victims -- Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, the Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, the Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr., the Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton and Myra Thompson -- were read by the Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder, who said she considered them the "beautiful nine."

"We're here to celebrate nine lives that matter," she said. "Someone pulled a trigger on our hearts and lives."

The Rev. Ryan Davis said peace is not found at the end of a gun barrel or the tip of a spear.

In between the prayers, songs of worship played, and some members of the crowd stood up with their arms raised.

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The religious leaders who were present agreed that Americans need to recognize that racial discrimination is a problem in this country and help bring about a solution.

All over the U.S., communities have come together to recognize that they need one another, the Rev. Ray P. Jones Jr. said.

No problem in our society can be suffered alone, he added.

Metro on 06/22/2015

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