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PHOTO BY OLIVIA OLIVIA/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Rev. Terry McCray Hill, pastor of Bethel AME Church (center), and Samiya Bashir, Reed College creative writing professor, participate in a public lighting of candles in memory of the nine African Americans killed at the historic Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. The community vigil was held at Bethel the day after the June 17 shooting, packing the northeast Portland church with hundreds of people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.

Solidarity with Charleston

Unity and hope ring out after black church massacre

BY OLIVIA OLIVIA
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The whole country has spent a week coming to terms with a massacre in a historically black southern church that took the lives of nine African-Americans, including the church pastor, South Carolina State Sen. Clementa Pinckney.

The June 17 shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, occurred during a regular Wednesday night bible study. The killer, 21-year-old Dylann Storm Roof, a self-proclaimed white supremacist, was arrested a few hours later.

The ensuing discussion surrounding the shooter's motives, and the history of white supremacist attacks on black communities and places of worship, has spread to Portland along with other major cities, all of which have sent back a message of solidarity and hope to the Charleston victims and families.

Shootings, bombings, and attacks of black churches are hardly new to Americans, or even to Charleston. The 199-year-old Emanuel AME Church has its own history of white supremacist attacks, and was burned

down in 1822 when one of the church's cofounders, Denmark Vesey, was accused of conspiring to form a slave rebellion. Vesey and 35 members of his all-black congregation were executed. Vesey's son would rebuild the church in 1865. The church came to be known as "Mother Emanuel" by community members who recognized it as the oldest historically black congregation south of Baltimore, Md.

A number of scholars, journalists, activists, and politicians have emphasized the need to understand the attack in the broader context of racism in the United States and especially in the South, rather than seeing it as an isolated event of racially motivated violence.

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