

## The Black Church and the Strength to Forgive

WASHINGTON – For many outside the Black community, they had never seen anything like it. Though suffering and deep in pain from the loss of loved ones at the hands of Dylann Roof at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, S.C., they reflected the finest reflection of Christian values.

A daughter Ethel Lance, 70, one of the nine killed at Bible study, struggled to find the right words.

“I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul,” she said, her voice trembling with emotion. “It hurts me, it hurts a lot of people, but God forgives you and I forgive you.”

Speaking for her family, a sister of Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, 49, had a similar message.

“We have no room for hate,” she said softly. “We have to forgive. I pray God on your soul. And I also thank God that I won’t be around when your judgment day comes with



**Jazelle Hunt**

NNPA Washington Correspondent

Tenn. and a scholar on the Black Christian church. “And that ultimately, though people will tragically experience what we saw happen at Mother Emanuel, ultimately love will prevail and hope will prevail.”

Rev. Susan K. Smith of Columbus, Ohio says that Scripture shows that it’s reasonable to feel and wrestle with difficult emotions, instead of jumping straight to forgiveness.

“If you don’t deal with your real, strong feelings, it’s almost impossible to get to a

not confessed to its wrong and its evil. And that evil is racism.”

Relatives of the nine slain in Charleston refused to be overcome by the evil of racism.

“In this particular context, we’re all deeply moved by the family offering up forgiveness, and I want to honor that supernatural manifestation of grace,” said Pastor Michael McBride, leader of The Way Christian Center in Berkeley, Calif., and director of the PICO Network Live Free Campaign, which uses faith to fight mass-criminalization.

“The process of forgiveness first has to acknowledge the offense...the gravity of the offense...the pain that’s been caused. Then it requires an analysis made in very clear terms the kinds of grievances that have been done, so as to not allow those grievances to continue to be perpetrated.”

According to a 2009 Pew Research Center report, nearly 80 percent of Black people say religion is very important in their lives, with 53 percent attending church every week (compared to 39 percent of the overall population).

Church is especially important to Black women who are unrivaled in their dedication to their faith (84 percent say they are) and attend church each week (nearly 60 percent do).

Pastor Jonathan Newton, executive minister at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in Washington, D.C., points out that the lesson of forgiveness is not only God’s way, but also served Black Christians well during the Civil Rights Movement by lending moral weight to the cause.

On the other hand, Pastor Newton explains that forgiveness is not necessarily passive.

Like Mother Emanuel, Metropolitan A.M.E. was founded in the early 1800s and has a storied legacy within the course of Black history. On Friday, hundreds gathered to pray for its sister church in Charleston – later, the church received a bomb threat in return. The previous day, a few other A.M.E. churches in South Carolina were threatened as well.

“[After the shooting] one of our A.M.E. bishops sent around to the churches a litany to explain that the church doors will remain open; we will continue to do what God calls us to do. But while we forgive, we still

step up security,” he says.

“Our [A.M.E.] tradition starts with the concept of social justice. The disparate treatment of people is not to be quietly tolerated. That we forgive doesn’t mean we forget, it just means we release the hold that bitterness and hatred has on us.”

The A.M.E. church is indeed grounded in resistance. Free Blacks in Philadelphia founded the denomination in the late 1700s when White Methodist Episcopalians refused to pray along side them and used force to interrupt their worship. The Black parishioners began their own church and successfully sued for the right to be an independent congregation.

This is not the first time a White supremacist had targeted a Black church.

According to one study, there were more than 300 racially-motivated church bombings or burnings in the 1960s, and an additional 200 between 1989 and 1996. In 2008, two White men were convicted of burning down a COGIC church in Springfield, Mass. in reaction to President Barack Obama’s election.

Pastor Newton and others maintain that emulating Christ’s example of love does not conflict with seeking justice and true reconciliation.

“This sounds trite, but the first thing is prayer. We believe that prayer changes things, but also prayer brings calm, reasonable, rational thinking.”

“[Then] we deal with it, and not try to suppress...we talk about the anger, the hurt. Our faith is what makes us strong through using political actions and our educations ... in our strides to social justice.”

‘It hurts me, it hurts a lot of people, but God forgives you and I forgive you’

him.”

One by one, they took turns, sharing their grief, but not any rancor. How could they be so forgiving?

In order to understand the answer to that question, experts on religion say, you have to understand the role the church plays in Black America and how the nation’s most religious group – African Americans – take the teachings of Jesus literally.

“To understand the Black Christian tradition and faith that has nurtured Black people for centuries is to know that they live by a deep, resilient faith that God is on the side of justice, God is on the side of love,” explained Rev. Forrest Harris, president of American Baptist College in Nashville,

place where you can forgive,” she said. Smith points to Psalm 13, saying, “The Psalmist, who expresses his pain...then at the end of the Psalm there’s a ‘but, I will praise you anyway.’ This is vital, because what we have with God is a relationship, and in relationships there are always times when you don’t get it.”

Rev. Amos Brown, pastor of the Third Baptist Church of San Francisco and NAACP national board member, said Blacks should not bear the brunt of suffering – or forgiveness – in the U.S.

“I do not feel in my spirit that Blacks should have to be the sacrificial lambs all the time,” he explained. “The pain is so great and it’s insulting that America has still

### Pastoral Anniversary Celebration at New Hope Baptist Church

New Hope Baptist Church will celebrate the 2nd Pastoral Anniversary of Senior Pastor, J. Walter Hills, II. Sunday, July 12th at 3:00 PM. The event will include a guest appearance from Rev. Johnnie Goldsmith of Anderson, SC. New Hope is located at 3725 N. Gantenbein, Portland. For more information, contact (503) 281.0163 or newhopepdx@comcast.net.



Pastor J. Walter Hills, II

# MFHM

My Father's House Ministries

Pastors Jerry and Annie Gutierrez  
invite you to join us in our  
New Location for our

## Celebration Service

Friday August 7th @ 7:pm

**The Double Tree Hotel**  
1100 NE Multnomah Street  
Portland, OR 97232  
Across from the Lloyd Center Mall  
**Free parking at the hotel**

for more information call 503.488.5481  
or log onto [www.mfhmportland.com](http://www.mfhmportland.com)

520 SW 3rd Ave. Portland, OR

(503)796-9250

[Avalonflowers@msn.com](mailto:Avalonflowers@msn.com)

[avalonflowerspdx.com](http://avalonflowerspdx.com)

**Avalon Flowers**

Creative, original designs

Anniversaries, weddings, funerals, birthdays!