

A Statement on the Charleston Massacre St. Louis Friends Meeting (Quakers) June 28, 2015

We, the St. Louis Friends Meeting (Quakers), grieve with the families, the friends, and the wider community of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. We hold in the Light - as is our tradition - all of those close to Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Cynthia Hurd, Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Daniel Simmons, DePayne Middleton Doctor and Susie Jackson. We join with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) - a Quaker organization that works to address the root causes of violence and oppression in communities worldwide - to acknowledge that "this purposeful act of mass violence cuts to the very core of our hopes for racial justice and a peaceful world."

Our grief extends well beyond Charleston as we are reminded that the scourge of white racism which - despite many years of struggle and resistance - continues to be widespread throughout our country.

The Charleston massacre of June 18th resonates with particular urgency here in St. Louis and Ferguson as we approach the one-year mark of the killing of Michael Brown, Jr. and the subsequent killing of Kajieme Powell, Vonderrit Myers, Jr. and Antonio Brown - all Black youth killed at the hands of white police or security officers.

In addition to expressing our solidarity with the victims' families, we emphasize that such expressions are not sufficient to end the institutionalized racism that makes our African-American brothers and sisters disproportionately poor, unemployed, imprisoned, and subject to police violence, and to the death penalty.

We concur with AFSC's statement: "Arresting the perpetrator of this mass murder will arrest a person, but not the problem. We will make no progress as a society if we believe that justice is done simply by punishing one individual white supremacist. Racism is not just a historic problem or the work of a few individual 'bad apples.' Racism - whether by direct intent or deeply entrenched structural factors - is a problem in all aspects of American life, including economics, housing, health care, criminal justice, policing, education, and media coverage, among others."

The Charleston massacre reveals our misplaced attention on an endless "war on terror" - with its enormous human and material costs - by demonstrating the lack of security our most vulnerable fellow citizens face on a daily basis here at home.

The persistence of racism in all its forms requires us - especially those of us who are white - to confront the racism in our society and in ourselves. We must educate ourselves about the history of racism and about the systemic structures that allow its horrors to persist in our midst, even though as individuals we may have ended our bigoted attitudes. We must use that knowledge to actively resist the manifestations of racism in our public institutions, in our families, and in our places of worship.