

What Will It Take?

Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton, Bishop of Maryland

Statement on the Murders at Emanuel AME Church on June 17

June 18, 2015

I am heartsick, outraged and in pain. Last night we saw another shooting in a church, a house of prayer and peace. Innocents are killed because they represent something — the wrong race, or faith, or both? In either case it is a tragedy that could have been avoided.

Last night, I presided at a celebration of renewal service in Ellicott City, Maryland. The people of St. Peter's Episcopal Church have been recovering, renewing and rebirthing since the May 2012 shootings that killed their parish administrator and a priest. The gunman, obviously mentally disturbed, died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Our experience here puts us in the unenviable group of sacred houses that have seen such evil. Emanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina is but the latest.

What will it take in our country to stop the plague of gun violence that not only kills innocent lives but is also tearing apart the fabric of our society? Yes, having a better mental health system must play a pivotal role, but what's really crazy is our society's irrational unwillingness to enact sensible legislation that has shown to be effective in reducing gun deaths.

Unless we get serious about dealing with how easy it was for that disturbed young man to get the guns that enabled him to profane that historic and sacred space in Charleston — a church that was a beacon in that community for human dignity, freedom and peace — then we are all complicit in that horrific act because of our failure of nerve.

I urge all people of faith not only to pray for the victims, but also to act to hallow their memory. Advocate in your local communities for sensible laws that will make it harder for would-be murderers to acquire weapons. Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence is one place to start.

Bishop Charles vonRosenberg of the Episcopal Church in South Carolina is asking us to “seek and develop avenues of racial conversation and reconciliation” and to “refuse to accept things as they are in our world; and...strive for the vision of peace offered by Jesus himself.”

I echo that and join him in calling for our own “self-examination, may we not neglect our own complicity in an environment of polarization and suspicion, and may we respond with sincere and profound confession to God, who loves us all.”

For God's sake and for the sake of our children, let's turn our outrage into outreach and transform our pain into action.