



CITY OF COLUMBIA  
SOUTH CAROLINA  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

June 22, 2015

An Open Letter to:  
The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton St.  
Columbia, SC 29201  
**Via Hand Delivery**

Dear Governor Haley:

On Wednesday, June 17th, a long time and dear friend of mine, Senator Clementa C. Pinckney, was murdered.

He was leading a bible study at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston when a young man opened fire and killed him and eight others: the Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, the Rev. Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, the Rev. Daniel L. Simmons Sr. and Myra Thompson.

Now, as we mourn this loss, we must also recognize it for what it is. This wasn't a crime of revenge, passion or greed. These nine men and women were not killed for their faith or their politics or out of revenge for some past deed. They were murdered in cold blood because of their race.

That may be difficult or even painful for us to admit, but it's true. And while we may never fully comprehend how that kind of hate can exist in this age of discovery and wonder, we know that it does. We see its banner flying before our Statehouse every single day.

So I write to you today to call on you as Governor of South Carolina, in the memory of Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Rev. Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Rev. Daniel L. Simmons Sr., Myra Thompson and the Honorable Senator Clementa C. Pinckney, to retire the Battle Flag of the Confederate States of America once and for all and remove it from the Statehouse grounds.

I understand that you may be meeting with some of our legislative leaders today and I want to plead with you to not let another generation of South Carolinians grow in the shadow of the degradation, oppression and violence this flag represents. Do not let another generation live with the complacency of hate that killed our fellow South Carolinians.

Heal this wound. Honor their loss. Together let's take down the flag.

Yours truly with sincere personal and professional regards,

Sincerely,

Stephen K. Benjamin  
Mayor  
Columbia, SC