



# READER, I ASK YOU TO COMMIT TO LOVE.

“If hate is the prerequisite to murder, then love must serve as its antidote.”

Ten years ago, a self-avowed white supremacist walked into a Bible study at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Reverend Clementa Pinckney, the ministers and congregants who gathered that night were people of faith, a faith rooted and grounded in love. The Bible defines this love as patient, kind, and never giving up on humanity. With this love, they welcomed the stranger in.

His intentions were made clear as he closed the Bible study with murder. He returned their investment of love with hate. If hate is the prerequisite to murder, then love must serve as its antidote. As we recognize the 10-year anniversary of that fateful day, I am encouraging us to make a commitment to love.

What we learned in the aftermath of the tragic killings of June 17, 2015, is that our community, when challenged, rises to those challenges. We also learned about the power of love through the manifestation of forgiveness, when some of the family members offered their forgiveness and their prayers for the murderer.

Or was it for him?

Maybe they forgave him because they knew if they didn’t, the same kind of hate that fueled his murderous rage might overtake them. Maybe they forgave him as a witness for all of us. Either way, their love and forgiveness teach us today.

Philanthropy is a discipline rooted in its love for humanity, but many often associate it with only financial giving. But Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Rev. Sharonda Singleton, Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr., Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Ethel Lance, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Myra Thompson, and their families, gave us something more enduring: the gift of unassailable love, marked by forgiveness.

I want to thank the families for your dignity and self-assurance; for with patience and empathy, you answered question after question testing your commitment to forgiveness and love. With strength and perseverance, you committed yourselves to honoring the memory of your loved one through service, leadership, and scholarship. I especially thank Pastors Betty Deas Clark and Eric Manning. They have balanced healing a congregation while leading a bereaved community. Their commitment to the Emanuel congregation, Charleston and Lowcountry community, and to the gospel they preach and teach reminds me of who we need to be.

In the aftermath of the tragedy at Mother Emanuel, we saw an outpouring of support from people around the world and right here at home. At Coastal Community Foundation, a group of anonymous donors were inspired to create a scholarship program in memory of Rev. Clementa Pinckney.



The Pinckney College Readiness and Scholarship program has grown to become one of the most impactful programs we have available to students. The program prepares students for college and ensures they graduate on time. The monetary award is supplemented by programming, helping students before, during, and after college graduation. Students come from the communities where Rev. Pinckney served as a State Senator, and they attend colleges and universities across the country. With a 92% graduation rate, Pinckney Scholars have gone on to practice law, medicine, and to teach in classrooms. Some have given their lives to social justice. All are representative of the leadership, focus, and love of Rev. Pinckney. When they come home, I love to hear their stories, to see how they have matured from uncertain teenagers to self-assured young professionals. These young people know who they are, who and what they

represent, and it is powerful. We’ve served 282 students across three elements of the program, and they demonstrate how out of tragedy there can be triumph with determination and ardent community support for change.

In the months following the tragedy, we were “Charleston Strong”, dedicated to supporting those threatened by bigotry and racism. We were angry that a hateful act like this touched our beloved community.

But ten years later, much has changed. What happened to us?

- In 2015, it was okay to tout the need for and the power of diverse voices in the workplace, schools, places of worship, and public agencies.
- In 2025, there is a full-on attack of anything remotely related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- In 2015, our community gathered, joined hands and proclaimed that hate won’t win.
- In 2025, hateful rhetoric has manifested itself in policies that are ripping our community apart.
- In 2015, we valued research demonstrating systemic barriers facing people of color in our communities.
- In 2025, we eschew data, denying the long-suffering of generations of families and immigrants, claiming the existence of some sort of anti-merit reverse discrimination.

Did we forget the lessons we learned that night?

Have we concluded we have done enough?

The last decade has taught us a few things. Most of all, it taught us that love and forgiveness are most complete with justice. These years have rightfully informed us that while thoughts and prayers are important first steps of healing, they are incapable of doing what only policy, practice, and investment can do.

We must have fair policies, transparent and equitable practices, and meaningful investments in humanity if we are going to have the kind of community where everyone can reach their full potential. These are essential ingredients to solving our communities’ most challenging problems. They are the counterbalance to what creates division and fear.

Philanthropy is an orientation of one’s spirit and a discipline of one’s mind. It’s embracing hope. Most of us are motivated by the opportunity to make a positive difference in the world in which we live. We do that in a number of ways, and no one way is more noble than the other. Some gift their time to care for patients at places like Shifa Free Medical Clinic or read to children at Kids on Point. Some gift their talent to working with small business owners and entrepreneurs at Increasing Hope Women’s Business Center, while others give their treasure to ensure we have places to gather and reflect like the International African American Museum. We can all be philanthropists. Those who established the Rev. Pinckney Programs, the Lowcountry Unity Fund, or the Mother Emanuel Scholarship Fund were motivated by tragedy. The fruits of their harvest are the lives that will change for generations. What motivates you to give of yourself?

So, what have we learned in the ten years since that heinous crime against humanity? In a world of opportunity, we must focus on opportunities for all. In times of challenge and turmoil, we must seek peace and love. When offense and wrong are directed at us, we must be quick to forgive. Love is not weak or sentimental, it is powerful and active. Love compels us to act not in our own self-interest, but on behalf of someone else. Love manifests itself as strength in those who have the power to share it and build it in others. These are the lessons I have learned in my time leading CCF and working to help shape communities rich in equity, opportunity, and well-being. These are the enduring truths of that day not so long ago, when time stood still at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC.

Sincerely,

Darrin Goss, Sr. President & Chief Executive Officer  
Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina