

## The Killing of Nine People at Church—July 2015

Just a few hours before the killing of nine people attending Bible Study at the AME Church in Charleston, SC, because of the color of their skin, the NC House passed HB 562, Amend Firearm Laws. 5 Democrats and 73 Republicans comprised the yeas, while 37 Democrats voted against the law. A hue and cry from Sheriff's organizations, educators, gun control advocates, women's groups (including our own members), and physicians persuaded house members to modify the law. The house discarded provisions to repeal the sheriff's firearm permitting process, as well as physicians' authority to ask about guns, and allowing legislative members to sport guns in the Capitol building. Be prepared for Act II when the law comes before the Senate.

The Charleston attack brings to light several issues. 1.) Gun violence is a public health issue. In the US, guns kill twenty times more people than any other high income nation. In our nation, there are 88 firearms per 100 people; in Yemen, 54.8. Dylann Roof was able to walk into a shop and buy a gun even though he had been charged with a felony. However, because his crime had not been adjudicated, the charge did not show up on his record. Fairly modest changes in licensing procedures do make a difference if neighboring states follow suit. There are studies supporting this fact.

2.) Racism is found in every country, but a free and just society cannot sanction racism in any form. White supremacy internet sites encourage domestic racism and incite misguided individuals. US white supremacy leaders even travel abroad to exchange ideas with the growing numbers of reactionary political groups in Europe who blame immigrants for joblessness and other societal ills. The setting of the crime in Charleston was not accidental. On NPR, the statement was made that there is a long history of violence against African-American Churches. I remembered a year (1995-96) where nine black churches were burned in NC. This is an expression of the same hatred that propelled Dylann Roof to kill. Under cover of darkness, church arsons, vandalism, or cross burning have occurred sporadically throughout the south well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unfortunately, in recent years, hate group numbers have increased. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, NC has 24 documented hate groups today.

3.) Until 1938, when SC senators fought against legislation that would have made lynching a federal crime, the Confederate Flag (battle variant) was rarely displayed. At this time, it was displayed at the statehouse of representatives to symbolize a victory for "states' rights", which in SC, in 1938, meant the right of whites to lynch African-Americans. The flag's popularity soared after Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, KS during the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960's. It was raised over the Statehouse in 1962 ostensibly to commemorate the anniversary of the Civil War but also in defiance of the Civil Rights movement. To the glib sons and daughters of the Confederacy who claim that their ancestors were protecting their homes and families, let's say, yes, but they were misguided. Men (and women) went to war in order to continue a way of life that depended on enslaving African-American human beings. The flag is a symbol of sedition, and nearly destroyed our nation. It is noteworthy that women organized and fought for anti-lynching laws including: suffragette Ida Bell Wells-Barnett after 3 friends were killed for running a successful store which took business away from a white store, Mary

Terrell, the first president of NAACW, Mary Talbot, affiliated with the NAACP, and Jessie Daniel Ames, who was the first white woman to speak out and form an organization to end lynching.

There is much work to be done in this world and I thank all of our members for your activism. Please mark the dates that our Program Vice-President Donna Wilson has listed elsewhere in the newsletter. We hope to see everyone on September 19 for our opening program! Enjoy your summer, be safe and stay well. --Bea Keller