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## Charting a better way forward for South Carolina after church killings

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On the evening of June 17, 2015, a hate crime took place at a Wednesday prayer meeting at Mother Emanuel AME Church near Marion Square in Charleston.

The absolutely horrid nature of the crime, the cold-blooded assassination of innocent people solely because they were black — all under the ideology of white supremacy — shocked us all. It tore at the social fabric we all depend on to carry out our daily lives in a civilized way in our communities and our country. And it is this kind of senseless crime, shaped by racism and fueled by hate and hate talk, that our state must confront in a common sense and deliberate way.

The family members of those who were killed and the leadership and members of Emanuel AME in Charleston, moving with grace, dignity, and Christian forgiveness, set an example for our communities, our state, and the entire country on how to begin the healing process and prevent greater racial division.

Many of our state's political, religious, and university leaders have responded with determination to remove the Confederate battle flag from the State House grounds, and that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, is the right thing for South Carolina.

But, as many voices have said, we as a state need to follow this important symbolic gesture with action. Let us take down the flag, yes, but let us begin to work deliberately to effect systemic change and to build a more inclusive South Carolina.

While we cannot immediately fix the toxic ideologies or individual acts of racists, we can work together to think and talk differently about our fellow citizens and neighbors who might look different from us.

There is real value, crucial value in healing conversations within communities across South Carolina, among individuals from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and religious backgrounds who can speak openly and also listen openly to perceptions of others about racial barriers and how injustices of the past continue to have an impact today.

These efforts toward the common good are of immense importance, but real and lasting change requires more from all of us. What are the next steps in uniting our state?

There is little debate over whether personal responsibility and hard work are critical to success in life.

Still, significant disparities in our systems of education, health, and justice have a disproportionate impact on poor and minority citizens in our state, making it difficult to receive the rewards of hard work. The collective impact of generational poverty, poor health and lack of access to well-paying jobs divides our state into two South Carolinas: one for those of us with access to broad interactions, collaborations that enable us to experience the best our state has to offer, and the other, people at the margins beset by barriers impeding their ability to join the economic mainstream.

As we think about how we think and talk about the people of South Carolina, it becomes morally and ethically clear that all of us, economically well off or poor, deserve a high quality education, good health care, and opportunities for good jobs. Creating conditions for this to happen makes great sense for our state in so many ways. The more educated our citizens the more likely they are to find good jobs and contribute to the economic well being of our state. The less likely our citizens will need social services and the more likely to add to the tax resources critical to pay for the social and physical infrastructure our state depends.

As we go forward from the horrors of June 17, let us learn from the example set by the parishioners and leaders of Mother Emanuel AME Church toward healing the gaping wound that appalled our state.

Let us have meaningful conversations that look honestly at the racial biases that poison minds and can lead to the most horrific acts.

Let us think and act deliberately about a new legacy for our state, one that brings the two South Carolinas together into one. A legacy of inclusion, of one South Carolina where we all share the benefits of belonging to the social and economic mainstream that connects us and offers collective hope for our state's future.

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