Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Our hearts ache for the nine faithful souls murdered while worshiping Wednesday evening at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and for their families, friends, and loved ones who mourn the loss of their precious lives. I join you in prayer for the souls of the departed, and for the soul of the young man who killed them.  
In the futile attempt to make some sense of so senseless an act of evil, I am wanting to categorize this as an isolated act of a solitary and deranged individual. But of course I cannot separate myself from it; it is a reflection of a social system in which I am complicit, by my action and my inaction alike. The depth of my heartache and yours is a measure of the inherent connectedness of the lives God has given us.

These nine Christian martyrs will have died in vain if our heartache does not lead us to challenge the culture of violence in which we all participate, in ways we are often unable and sometimes unwilling to recognize. In the fierce light of this tragedy, if we do not multiply our efforts to place the tolerance of others high above our tolerance of hostility, and place society’s responsibility to provide safety to all her members high above the individual’s access to tools of violence, we are abdicating our primary vocation to bring the kingdom of heaven to life.

May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace, and may we not rest until that same peace reigns on earth.

Your companion in Christ,  
The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.  
Bishop of Ohio