

New pastor seeks to bring hope to Charleston church following massacre

by [Jessica Mendoza](#)

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church church in Charleston, South Carolina, has a new pastor.

Betty Deas Clark became the first female pastor at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Saturday (January 23), local news outlets reported. The next day she delivered her first sermon, which focused on a message of hope.

“God feels our pain, hears our cries and he knows our every move,” Clark said in her sermon, according to the *Post and Courier*. “While the dreams, expectations, and bodies of many have been laid to rest, we must not allow nor put our hope to rest. We must believe as a family in God that our best days are in front of us. We must believe that better days are coming.”

Emanuel AME, called “Mother Emanuel,” is where avowed white supremacist Dylann Roof on June 17 opened fire and killed nine people at a Bible study. Among the victims was Clementa Pinckney, the church’s pastor who was also a state senator.

Pinckney’s death was a blow to the historic church, which has long stood as a symbol of the black community’s struggle for equal rights in Charleston.

“The black church is also a symbol of the civil rights struggle that was birthed in the 1950s,” said Randal Jelks, professor of African-American studies at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and an expert in the intersection of race and religion. “The centers of the black freedom struggle were always black churches, so this attack reminds people of those past struggles.”

Norvel Goff, who is now running for bishop, was interim pastor.

Clark was pastor at Mount Pisgah AME church in Sumter, South Carolina, and has become the first woman in a number of posts, including president of the Ministerial Alliance for the Charleston area and chair of the Board of Examiners in South

Carolina, according to her page on the Mount Pisgah website.

“We welcome her back to Charleston as she, her husband and family wrap their arms around their new church family to nurture them as they move forward as a relevant witness to Christ in the city of Charleston and to the world,” said Kylon Middleton, a close friend to Pinckney and his family, to the *Post and Courier*.

Following Clark’s sermon on Sunday, longtime parishioners expressed delight at her message.

“Thank the Lord, God has sent us a woman after God’s own heart,” one woman told the paper.

Another applauded the sermon, calling it “excellent and to the point. It almost alluded to some of the things Martin Luther King said, in my opinion; hope and justice,” he said.