

Slain S.C. pastor Clementa Pinckney was 'a giant, a legend'

by [Matthew Diebel](#)

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“He was a giant, a legend, a moral compass.”

Those are the words used by fellow state senator Marlon Kimpson on CNN Thursday morning to describe Clementa Pinckney, the pastor and politician who was among nine people killed when a gunman, believed to be white, opened fire Wednesday evening at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Pinckney’s sister also died in the shooting, said J. Todd Rutherford, the minority leader of the state’s House of Representatives. Her name is not known and the other victims, two men and five women, were not immediately identified.

Rutherford, who has served in the State Legislature with Pinckney since 1998, told the *New York Times* that his colleague was “a man driven by public service” whose booming voice inspired his congregation and constituents.

Pinckney, 41, was married with two children and had served in the state Senate since 2000, according to an online biography on the church’s website.

The pastor was a magna cum laude graduate of Allen University with a degree in business administration and went on to earn a master’s degree in the same subject at the University of South Carolina, the site said. He then obtained a master’s of divinity from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

According to Rutherford and the website, Pinckney started preaching at 13 and received his first appointment to be a pastor at 18. At 23, he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives the youngest state legislator in South Carolina history, and in 2000 was elected to the State Senate. Washington Post columnist David Broder called Pinckney a “political spirit lifter for surprisingly not

becoming cynical about politics,” the site said.

A black mourning cloth was draped over Pinckney’s seat in the senate chamber in the capital, Columbia, Wednesday, according to news reports.

In 1999, *Ebony Magazine* named Pinckney as one of 30 African-American leaders of the future. He and his wife, Jennifer, have two children, Eliana and Malana.

State Rep. Wendell Gilliard told the *Charleston Post and Courier* that he visited Pinckney’s wife and daughters after the shooting, saying that the family is “surrounded by friends.”

In April, Pinckney helped lead a prayer vigil for Walter Scott, a black South Carolina man who was shot dead by a police officer as he tried to run away.

The church is one of the nation’s oldest black congregations. It is housed in a 1891 Gothic Revival building which is considered a historically significant building, according to the National Park Service, which said that the church is the oldest black congregation south of Baltimore.

The congregation was formed by black members of Charleston’s Methodist Episcopal Church who broke away “over disputed burial ground,” according to the park service’s website.

In 1822, one of the church’s co-founders, Denmark Vesey, tried to start a slave rebellion in Charleston, the website added. The plot was discovered and 35 people were executed, including Vesey.

Joseph Darby of the AME Church in Beaufort, South Carolina, described Pinckney as “an advocate for the people.” He told MSNBC that “he was a very caring and competent pastor, and he was a very brave man. Brave men sometimes die difficult deaths.”