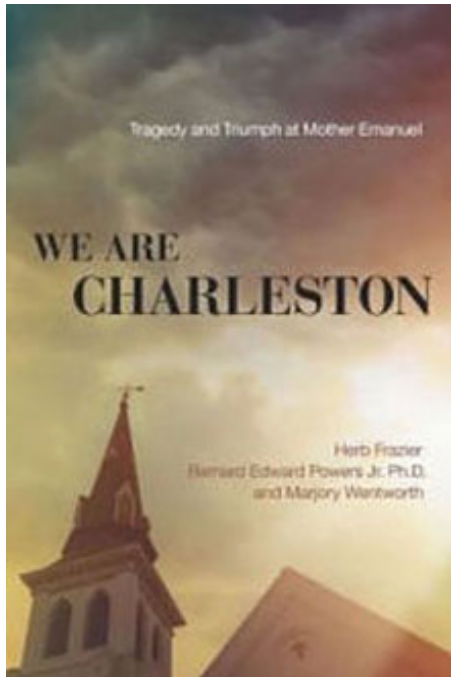




South Carolina's Poet Laureate Marjory Wentworth will be one of the featured guests at USCB's Lunch with Author event on Thursday, June 30th, where she'll discuss *We Are Charleston: Tragedy and Triumph at Mother Emanuel*, the book she coauthored with Dr. Bernard E. Powers, Jr. and Herb Frazier.

On June 17, 2015, at 9:05 pm, a young man with a handgun opened fire on a prayer meeting at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, killing nine members of the congregation. The captured shooter, 21 year-old Dylan Roof, a white supremacist, was charged with th



eir murders. Two days after the shooting, while Roof's court hearing was held on video conference, the families of his nine victims, one by one, appeared on the screen—forgiving the killer. The "Emanuel Nine" set a profound example for their families, their city, their nation, and indeed the world.

Written by Editor
Monday, 13 June 2016 08:23

We Are Charleston not only recounts the events of that terrible day, but also offers a history lesson that reveals a deeper look at the suffering, triumph, and even the ongoing rage of the people who formed Mother Emanuel AME Church and the wider denominational movement.

"The book is framed by the present," says Wentworth, five-time Pushcart Prize nominee who lives on Sullivan's Island. "The first couple of chapters are set last summer during the time of the shooting and the taking down of the Confederate flag. Then we get into the history sections – history of slavery, history of the AME Church and Mother Emanuel in particular, and the neighborhood surrounding the church, as well as Charleston's civil rights history. We also talk about forgiveness and people in service to the church – historically and now – and what's next. Even when we dip into the past we are linking it to the present, because you can't understand what happened without understanding the past."

Wentworth and her coauthors interviewed several of the Emanuel Nine family members, along with friends and church members. Some of the family members were hard to reach – "We didn't push," says Wentworth – while others were eager to talk about their lost loved ones.

"For some, it seemed to be part of the healing process," she says. "Others couldn't do it. Obviously, it was emotional under every circumstance."

In a country that has been roiling with racial discord over the past few years, Wentworth believes what happened in Charleston stands apart in distinctive ways and may have lessons to teach us.

"First, this was an admitted attack on a race of people. When this happens on a large scale we call it genocide. How many others still feel the same way as the killer does? His actions created a lot of fear, and it hasn't disappeared.

"The forgiveness piece is also a big difference. It's very complicated and comes from faith and respect for the fallen – what the loved ones would want them to do. It's a living example of what Lincoln referred to as 'the better angels of our nature.' It reminds the world that there is a better way to be, and it's more powerful than violence."

For Marjory Wentworth, meeting the family and friends of the Emanuel Nine was "the greatest blessing" and a life-changing experience.

"I will never be the same," she says. "They are extraordinary in so many ways. Very few people really practice what they preach, and these people do it every waking hour. They are the best of us and they are now our teachers.

"I am left with a deeper understanding of what it means to practice one's faith. Your work, your relationships, are all part of it."

We Are Charleston tells the story of a people, continually beaten down, who seem to continually triumph over the worst of adversity. Exploring the storied history of the AME Church may be a way of explaining the price and power of forgiveness, a way of revealing God's mercy in the midst of tremendous pain.

We Are Charleston may help us discover what can be right in a world that so often has gone wrong.

"Ethel Lance's daughter Nadine Collier said that 'forgiveness is power,'" says Wentworth. "Choosing love over hate, choosing peace. If we don't believe in that, how do we get through the day? We choose love. Words to live by in Charleston and Sandy Hook and far too many towns and cities in this country."

Marjory Wentworth on the 'Emanuel Nine'

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Marjory Wentworth will be joined by one of her coauthors, veteran SC journalist Herb Frazier, at the USCB Lunch with Author event on June 30th at the Sonesta Resort on Hilton Head. Tickets for the program and luncheon are \$42. For more information or to make reservations, call 843-521-3145.