



SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE, INC.

With Vision...By Faith...Through Action

Strengthening Churches...Empowering Leaders...Transforming Communities

Reflections on Recent Church Burnings Rev. Dr. Susan Smith

We, the members of the Board of Trustees of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc, convey our righteous indignation and protestation over the recent spate of burnings of black churches that have occurred since the tragic murder of nine innocent and unarmed black people two weeks ago at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Over the course of seven days, seven black churches have caught fire in various locations in the South. Although authorities have been reluctant to label these fires hate crimes, and in a couple of cases, investigations have not verified that the fires were the result of arson, we are concerned that media and politicians alike have been hesitant to renounce these fires as being assaults on the black community. We feel that the fact that some of these fires *have* in fact been labeled arson is enough to support the theory that these are, in fact, hate crimes, and that supposition is even more valid as members of the white nationalist community are angry because of the conflict over the Confederate flag. Their anger must not be channeled as violence against African-American churches. We hold that as a very real possibility.

Our question is, “What will this nation, our politicians, and others in authority do about this?” We are long past Reconstruction and Jim Crow, where law enforcement and politicians were often complicit in hate crimes leveled against African-Americans and were therefore silent when such crimes occur. We are now in the 21st century. The African-American community is reeling from a rash of shootings and killings of black men and women at the hands of police; we have not felt the support from our law enforcement and political leaders to which African-Americans are entitled.

It has been said that evil triumphs when people of good conscience remain silent. The silence of our religious, political and law enforcement leaders has been deafening, and we know that the evil which has inspired these church burnings will only become more virulent if the silence amongst you is not broken. It is past time for politicians, law enforcement personnel and religious leaders to step up and break their silence in light of continued violence toward the African-American community.

We are grateful that these fires have so far not resulted in the death or injury of any individuals, but surely, we do not want to wait until such injury occurs. We are hopeful that the conspiracy of silence as concerns acts of terror against the African-American community will be broken, finally, so that people of conscience can begin to work earnestly for an end to this unfettered violence. It is up to all of us to work for justice; we can no longer allow evil to have its way.

We reaffirm our commitment to stand firm for justice and in solidarity with The Week of Righteous Resistance (WORR). Join Us!