

Charleston Shooting: Church holds first service after massacre

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Washington: Charleston's historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church reopened its doors and held its first service four days after a 21-year-old white man gunned down nine black church members in one of the worst tragedies of its kind at a US religious institution.

"A lot of folks expected us to do something strange and to break out in a riot. Well, they just don't know us," Reverend Norvel Goff said, on Sunday, before hundreds of worshippers.

"We are a people of faith."

One of the victims of the massacre was the church's pastor, Rev. and Democratic state senator Clementa Pinckney, whose seat in the church was draped in black.

At 10 a.m. church bells all over Charleston, known as South Carolina's "Holy City" for its heavy concentration of churches, pealed to recall the nine victims.

The number of worshippers exceeded its maximum capacity of 1,200.

In recent days, the church and vicinity have seen many signs of local and national support for the families of the slain.

Heavy police personnel were deployed in and around the church, and people were not allowed to bring backpacks inside and had their handbags and fannypacks searched by officers.

Attending the service was Republican South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, presidential hopeful Rick Santorum, conservative state senator Tim Scott and Democratic Congresswoman for California Maxine Waters.

Dylann Roof entered the church on Wednesday and opened fire on a group of people inside, including several who had just participated in a bible study session, with the declared aim of sparking a "race war".

He was later apprehended by police and is currently in custody.

After the massacre, President Barack Obama called upon the country to urgently change its attitude on allowing people to own handguns and other weapons.

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