

Charleston church shooting: Police hunt suspected killer

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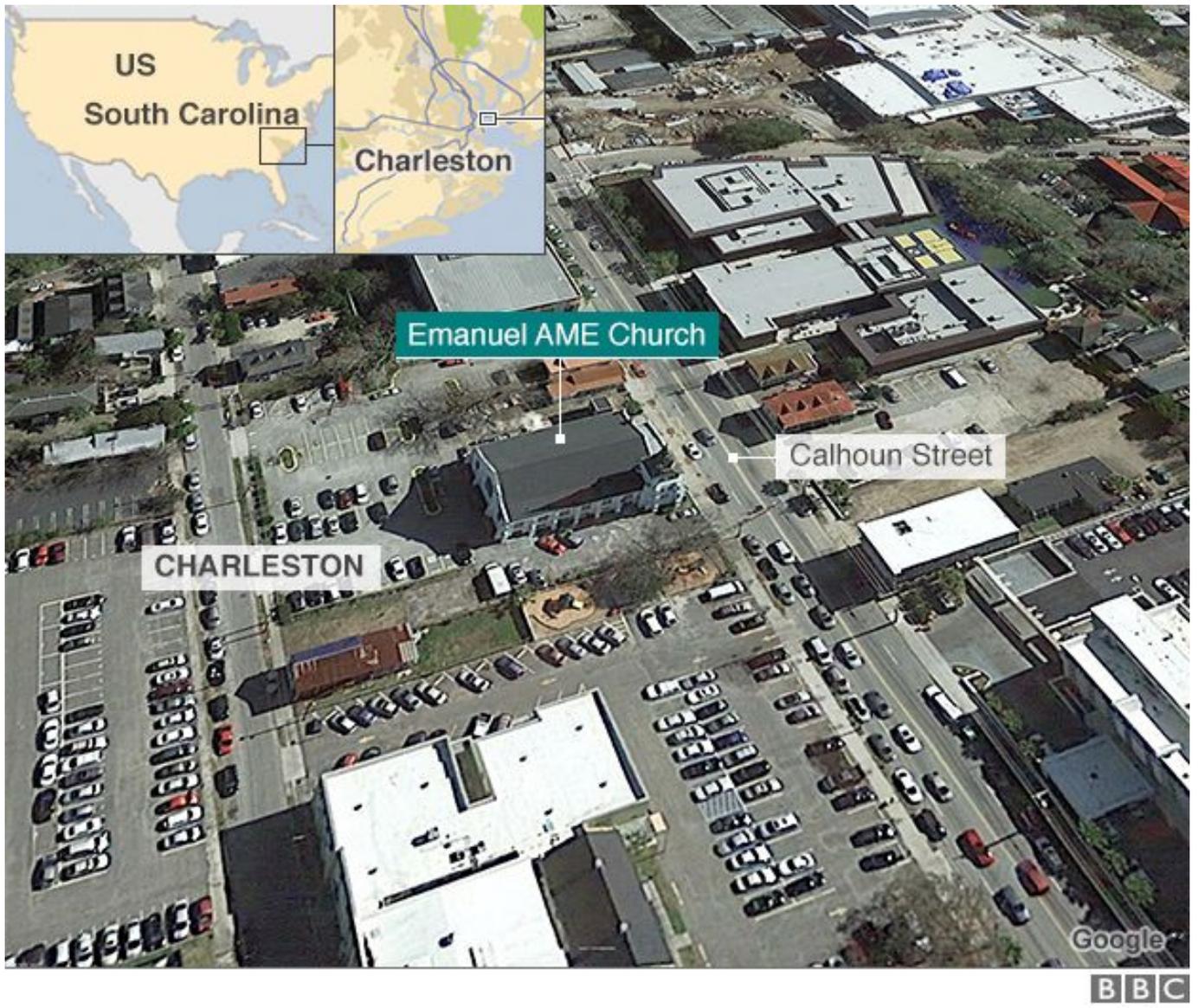
Multiple US media reports, citing the FBI and other authorities, have named the suspect as 21-year-old Dylann Roof of Columbia, South Carolina.

Police said the gunman sat in a bible study meeting for up to an hour before opening fire, killing six women and three men including the church pastor.

Officials have called it a hate crime.

The US Justice Department said it would carry out a federal hate crimes investigation in "parallel to and co-operative with the state's investigation".

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A group of worshippers later gathered nearby to pray



Police say they are searching for a white male suspect in his 20s

The weekly bible study meeting was under way in the church on Calhoun Street when the shooting unfolded at about 21:00 local time (01:00 GMT Thursday).

Charleston police chief Gregory Mullen said that when police arrived at the scene eight people were already dead in the church and that one other person died later in hospital. There were three survivors, he added.

One woman survivor told her family that the gunman said he was letting her live so she could report what happened, [according to the Charleston Post and Courier](#).

Police described the suspect as white, aged 21-25, and clean shaven with a slender build. They said he was wearing a grey sweatshirt, blue jeans and Timberland boots.

They released images from surveillance cameras showing him at the church, and also of a black four-door saloon car he was seen driving away in.

"This is a very dangerous individual who should not be approached," Mr Mullen said.

Members of the community reacted with shock and sadness at the news. Some residents formed prayer circles outside the church.

Charleston Mayor Joe Riley called it "an unfathomable and unspeakable" tragedy. South Carolina Senator Tim Scott [tweeted](#): "My heart is breaking for Charleston and South Carolina tonight."

Bystander Shona Holmes said: "It's just hurtful to think that someone would come in and shoot people in a church. If you're not safe in church, where are you safe?"

The Emanuel AME Church



- Oldest African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in US south
- Referred to as "Mother Emanuel"
- Roots stem from group of free blacks and slaves in 1791
- Denmark Vesey - one of the founders - was a leader of a failed slave revolt in 1822
- Rebuilt in 1891, replacing church damaged by 1886 earthquake
- Civil rights leader Martin Luther King gave a speech at the church in April 1962

[Charleston church's important role](#)

[Profile: Pastor Clementa Pinckney](#)

Among the dead was the high-profile 42-year-old pastor of the church Clementa Pinckney, a father of two who was also a Democratic state Senator in South Carolina.

His fellow senator Kent Williams said his death was hard to believe.

"It's devastating, devastating that someone would go into God's house and commit such a crime," he told CNN. "It's just a huge, huge loss."

Senator Pinckney had recently sponsored a bill to make body cameras mandatory for all police officers in South Carolina.

The legislation was in response to the death two months ago of Walter Scott, an unarmed black man who was fatally shot by a white police officer in North Charleston.

The shooting prompted angry protests and highlighted racial tension in the city. The officer has since been charged with murder



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