

# floral management

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## IN CHARLESTON, WHAT CAN I DO?

> We have all seen a sad or tragic story, felt bad, but then said to ourselves, "Ah ... but what can I do?" Then we'll change the channel and get on with our life. It's a crazy and sometimes terrible world, and we're all just a tiny part of it. And really, what *can* we do?

On June 17, a disturbed and evil man walked into a local church, prayed with a bible study group for an hour and then killed nine of them. In my town. A mile from my store. I asked, "What can I do?" but this time I meant it.

The mayor's office asked for donated plants for a prayer vigil. "Of course," I answered. We placed a large wreath at the church with the message "Charleston United," a message we hoped would be correct. We did not include our logo or charge for the wreath. Still, it wasn't enough. What else can I do?

Folks came into the shop. They also asked, "What can I do?" They bought flowers from florists, grocery stores, even picked them from their own garden and piled them at the church. I realized that the best thing I could do was to stand aside. Let other people contribute flowers. Don't take that away from them.

An 8-year-old boy came in with his mom and younger sister. He was at the church and saw thousands of flowers wilting in the Charleston heat. "I'm going to take care of the flowers every day so they look pretty." We gave him what he needed, and he asked us to sign a giant card he made. The card wasn't "pretty," on recycled cardboard in a child's scrawl, but it was wonderful.

An elderly lawyer from Washington, D.C., called. He didn't know any of the victims, but he was very upset. I think he needed to talk to someone, anyone, in Charleston. "We can't have any more of this in America!" he explained. "We have to be better than this." His pride in country and for our people was clear. He purchased nine standing sprays at \$250 each. On his own dime. He trusted us to make sure they got to the right folks. He called every day for three days, making sure the order was OK, and asking us, "What else can I do?"

One woman came from Ohio and gave hugs to anybody who needed one. She gave every hug as if it was the most important hug. She took a bus to get here.



Local kids answered the question by selling lemonade and donating to the church. They raised over \$2,800 in two days.

I asked the question again, "What can I do?" I loaded two boxes with a couple hundred votive candles, printed out a sign that read, "When the sun sets, please light a candle and say a prayer," and drove to the church. I had to park several blocks away. The walk took five minutes, and my arms were aching when I arrived. It felt good, though. Along the way, I passed hundreds of people saying hello. Holding shade umbrellas over the elderly. Buying and then giving away bottles of water. Strangers holding hands and speaking to God. Smiles, tears, sweat everywhere. I dropped the boxes, one at each end of the makeshift memorial. A woman touched my arm and said thank you. The next day in the paper I saw the same boxes. Someone had refilled them with more candles.

President Obama came down and sang "Amazing Grace." He answered his own question of "What can I do?"

In the days that followed, we received many orders for funeral flowers. We donated all the profit to the families.

In the end, the real answer to "What can I do?" was this: Respect and help people more. Understand that we're more alike than different. Let's make things better, forever, together. 🌸

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