



June 14, 2016

Florida and the Nation Grieve For Loved Ones and Positive Changes

The nation grieves over the senseless evil which consumed the lives of 49 souls and injured some 54 more at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando on June 12, 2016. These Floridians, many of Puerto Rican heritage, gathered to celebrate their Latin culture. As we learn the names and hopes of each one, we feel the impact across our churches, schools, and workplaces. The interweaving of our lives means that hundreds, if not thousands of families, are directly impacted by this massacre. We are holding our loved ones tightly. In the days ahead we will attend many funerals and hold countless prayer services. In our churches and among our members thousands of prayers have already been said and numerous vigils held, for we “weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn”. There is no place for the rhetoric of hate in our hearts.

We are people born from the pain of the cross upon which Jesus of Nazareth was executed. Scripture teaches us that those whose life is violently stolen from them are indeed washed in the same experience as Jesus; as Revelation 7:14 (NRSV) says, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Our solidarity with the victims and their families is visceral from the very core of our faith. We pledge our houses of worship as spaces in which comfort for the grieving can be found and the rhetoric of hate has no place.

We are deeply grateful for the police officers, first responders, medical care personnel, and chaplains who are providing direct aid and assistance to victims and their family and friends. They, along with those who are donating blood or have distributed water at the scene, are truly a sign of the common humanity which unites us all. Such signs can serve to show us all how to act for positive change in society.

The news reports describe a Floridian born in Queens NY who suffered extreme emotional distress and appeared to have found meaning in hateful, violent militancy. In as much as the perpetrator was known to law enforcement and to many at the Pulse Club, we must closely examine our political will. Our society has yet to provide sufficient appropriate mental health care to our own population or safeguard the availability of dangerous armaments. Knowing our own profound needs to provide mental health services and to restrict access to assault weapons, we are reluctant therefore to credit any distant agency with ownership of this terrible massacre. The same weapon used at the Pulse Night Club was also used in Sandy Hook and San Bernardino. Let us not be shy about taking the necessary steps for securing heavy firearms.

We are especially concerned about the two communities particularly experiencing the impact of the Orlando massacre. Everyone in LGBTQ and Muslim communities deserves to know they are safe in our society and free from any kind of discrimination. As Americans and people of faith, the sacredness of individual conscience is paramount in recognizing the dignity of every human being and of exercising First Amendment rights. No form of violence, whether it is terrorism or spiritual teaching, has the right to denigrate any person. In this moment of grief, we implore all of the members of our churches as well as the public in general to hold the human dignity of everyone in highest regard and courageously speak up for the rights of the minorities when they are attacked.

To the fallen, may God grant them eternal rest and let perpetual light shine on them. To their families, we mourn with you and pray for your well-being. To leadership across the sectors of society, we implore your courage in addressing forthrightly the needs of the day.

According to Everytown for Gun Safety, this is the ninth mass shooting in 2016, and the 150th mass shooting since 2009. Lord, have mercy!

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