

To the People of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon,

My sincere greetings to those with whom and to whom I proclaim the love of God for all people, following the example of Jesus, who gave himself for us.

Peace and grace be with you.

Once again this week we face the specter of a tragedy the magnitude of which is hard for us to comprehend. And this time, we have witnessed violence against a community that already bears too much misunderstanding and discrimination from contemporary society. Making the aftermath of this horrific event even more heart wrenching are layers of issues, not the least of which is religious intolerance.

Let us not confuse who are the victims of this crime: they were targeted because they were members of the LGBTQ community. As such, this crime is against all humanity, just as were attacks in recent memory against other specific groups. This time the victims were brothers and sisters who as a group have previously been victimized by distrust, disdain, and discrimination. There was nothing random about this attack which makes it even more deplorable, if that is possible, than previous mass murders which appeared to be more random in nature, though no less senseless or evil.

I am thankful for the prayerful support offered by our congregations this past weekend. During the ensuing week it has poured out further into gatherings and vigils around Eastern Oregon, in which the victims of Sunday's shootings are remembered, along with their loved ones, families, and friends. I join with you in such prayer, confident of its power and effectiveness. (James 5:16)

I write to you now, however, to enjoin you to act in addition to your prayers. We cannot change the situations of those victimized in Orlando, but we can make a difference for others, for those who live within our communities who may feel like outsiders for those same reasons—distrust, disdain, and discrimination. We must not allow inaction to hallmark our response to those who are close to us simply because we are moved by a far off tragedy. In other words, we cannot do much for the people of Orlando; but we can do a lot for the people of Eastern Oregon..

To start, I encourage you to talk and listen to each other. Let our church communities be safe places to voice our frustrations, our concerns, our various perspectives, along with our hopes and dreams. And let us listen actively, open to learning something new about ourselves, and about the insights of others. Let us be open to change. And from the change, let us act. Discuss ways in which you individually, and you as groups, might work for positive change in your community.

You may well identify specific ways to respond, but to aid you in the discussion, allow me to offer some possible avenues:

- Form a support group for LGBTQ individuals and their families - a couple of our communities already have PFLAG chapters, so get involved with them. Or look into forming one yourself: <https://www.pflag.org/about/our-people>
- Actively engage in learning the truth about other faith traditions, especially Jewish and Muslim, or engage conversations with them when possible; consider developing an interfaith movement: <http://www.interfaithalliance.org>
- Become aware of/included in gun violence efforts: <https://www.facebook.com/EpiscopaliansAgainstGunViolence/>
- Utilize this litany during a service: <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/06/14/litany-for-gun-violence-prevention-offered-for-use-in-sunday-services/>

- And share this video from our Presiding Bishop and Primate:

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/06/12/presiding-bishop-michael-curry-prayers-for-orlando/>

You may well be inspired to find other ways to act. But act we must. Please let me know what steps you intend to take.

For my part, this is my action:

- I have this past Monday met with the director of the Interfaith Alliance of Idaho in Boise. I have asked her to come to Coeur d' Alene in August to meet with me and a few others to help form an interfaith effort in North Idaho. I have also asked her to help us brainstorm ways we might promote this in Eastern Oregon.
- I am going to head home next Monday, and I am going to meet with members of our PFLAG group there to explore even deeper how we support and protect our queer sisters and brothers.
- And I am going to become politically active in getting the words "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" added in Idaho to the state's human rights act.

With all of us doing something, people's lives will be affected. And God's love will be proclaimed.

My love and respect to you all,

Patrick
Bishop.