

Thoughts on Orlando

I arrived home after Meeting for Business last Sunday to hear the sad news coming out of Orlando. Another tragic mass shooting, this time aimed at the LGBTQ community. This was the 13th mass shooting in this country in the last eight years. Each one seems more horrific than the one before. This one was labeled the “worst” because of the large loss of life and the number of injured who are still fighting for their lives in Orlando area hospitals.

All of the moments of silence in memory of the victims are important ways to show our sorrow. All of the calls to keep the victims and their families “in our thoughts and prayers,” is another way to express our sense of loss. The grieving process can include giving money to the families who have lost loved ones, being a part of vigils held in memory of the victims, as well as speaking out against the hate that caused the gun man to inflict this violence.

We also need to recognize the truth that our country has some serious issues centered around our love of guns and the violence this love perpetrates. The sad truth is that after each mass killing there is always a spike in new gun sales. One gun dealer said that after Orlando he was selling 10 assault rifles per hour. The fact that this particular gun man was able to purchase the weapons used in this killing spree with such relative ease, should disturb us all. We should also be disturbed by the gun killings in this country that take more lives every day than the killer did in one night in Orlando. It is an epidemic that threatens the core of our society.

And so we stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ community who are grieving this hate crime. As Quakers we reiterate our Peace Testimony, recognizing that violence begets violence, and the continuous wars we are fighting are only preparing us to fight more wars in the future. In the words of William Penn, “Let us see what love can do.” How this love can find expression in the midst of the power politics and calls for even more violence, I do not know. But I am convinced that after each shooting, we must begin anew to find ways to love rather than new and more destructive ways to act out of hate. “Never send to ask for whom the bell tolls,” wrote John Donne, “It tolls for thee.” No one is immune from the terrible consequences that result from the violent culture in which we live. Each time a cruelty is done to another and each time someone dies, all of us are affected. We are, indeed, connected with one another, and because of this connection, we grieve for the victims and with their families, and we hope for a more peaceful society in the future.

-Jim Newby