

Religious roots of hatred resurface in Orlando

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(RNS) One year after the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples can legally marry across the country, and at a time when most polls show a majority of Americans support LGBT equality, the mass shooting in Orlando, Florida, shocked many Americans who had begun to take gay rights for granted.

Not only did the shootings at the Pulse nightclub occur during Pride month, when LGBT people and supporters across the U.S. celebrate the gains they have made toward equality, they also took place at a gay club—historically a safe gathering place for LGBT people, especially back when no other establishments would welcome them.

Suspected gunman Omar Mateen, 29, was armed with an assault-type weapon and a handgun when he opened fire at the Pulse nightclub, killing 50 people. Mateen, who was killed in a shootout with police, was born in the U.S. to parents who emigrated from Afghanistan.

Mateen's father, Mir Seddique, told news media that his son seemed upset after seeing two gay men kissing in Miami a few months ago.

The messages many took from the massacre were that LGBT people are still not safe, and that religious teachings—or at least a narrow reading of them—are a contributing factor to hatred against LGBT people.

Religious leaders from Pope Francis to the Florida chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations sharply condemned the shooting.

The Vatican's spokesperson, Federico Lombardi, said Pope Francis shares in the victims' "indescribable suffering" and "he entrusts them to the Lord."

Muslim groups also condemned the killings.

“The Muslim community joins our fellow Americans in repudiating anyone or any group that would claim to justify or excuse such an appalling act of violence,” read a statement from the Council on American-Islamic Relations. The Florida chapter also called on the Muslim community to take part in a blood drive for those wounded in the attack.

But such words from religious groups provided cold comfort to many gay activists.

“There’s such a cognitive dissonance for me when public officials ask us to pray when the majority of world religions promote anti-LGBT theology,” said Eliel Cruz, executive director of Faith in America, an organization that attempts to end the harm to LGBT youths it says is caused by religious teachings. “This isn’t isolated to Muslim beliefs. It’s seen in Christianity and it’s just as deadly.”

Just last month in Congress, Rep. Rick W. Allen, from Georgia’s 12th District, led a Republican policy group’s opening prayer by reading from Romans 1:28-32: “God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. ... Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Others cite Leviticus 20:13 or Qur'an 7:80-84.

LGBT groups across the nation sprang into action Sunday. Equality Florida, the state’s LGBT civil rights organization, began collecting contributions via this GoFundMe page to support the victims of the shooting.

A host of demonstrations and vigils were being planned across the country, including at Stonewall, the historic Greenwich Village gay inn where riots broke out in 1969 in response to police raids.

Thousands lined Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood Sunday for the 46th annual LA Pride Parade. Organizers announced that the celebration would begin with a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting.

One of the owners of Orlando’s Pulse club, Barbara Poma, started the establishment to promote awareness of the area’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender community. Her brother died from AIDS-related complications, *USA Today* reported.

Poma opened Pulse on Orange Avenue with friend and co-founder Ron Legler in 2004.

“It was important to create an atmosphere that embraced the gay lifestyle with décor that would make John proud,” Poma wrote on the club’s website. “Most importantly, [we] coined the name Pulse for John’s heartbeat—as a club that is John’s inspiration, where he is kept alive in the eyes of his friends and family.”

President Obama said Pulse “is more than a nightclub—it is a place of solidarity and empowerment where people have come together to raise awareness, to speak their minds, and to advocate for their civil rights.”

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