

What all Christians can learn from queer courage

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(RNS) As our country asks how to protect itself from the terror of more mass shootings, elected leaders who call themselves Christian might look to the LGBTQ community for inspiration. Queer people have a weapon in our arsenal that no gun will ever defeat.

We dance.

That's what we have always done to celebrate our lives and our love. From the femme lovingly stroking her butch's lapel as they sway in each other's arms, to the Pride marchers who turn our city streets into sprawling dance floors, to the Latinx queers (neither Latino nor Latina) doing the merengue in Orlando, we have always found ourselves, our souls, our courage, in the rhythm of our bodies set to music.

Our bars have always been places where we can be ourselves together. They have long been sanctuaries, as so many have noted in the past few days. But we don't kid ourselves: the bars have never been safe spaces. The butches and femmes and faggots of the mid-20th century knew that the cops were coming, that a raid could happen any night, leading to assault, arrest, and public shaming.

They knew, and they went anyway.

They went because despite the chronic threat of violence, the bars were also places where we had a sense of identity, a sense of family, a sense of home. They have always been places where, in one way or another, we have found love. And queer people know that love demands vulnerability.

This awareness is not some relic of a bygone era. For better and for worse, an awareness of the threat of violence is encoded in our cultural DNA.

Those of us who are particularly visible, including trans people and queers of color, are conscious of this threat every day of our lives. And so we dance. Knowing that

our gathering places might become targets for violence, we crank up the sound, clap our hands, look each other in the eye, and put our bodies and souls on fabulous display.

In this way, the LGBTQ community models a kind of courage that reminds me, an Episcopal priest, of the kind of spiritual courage that Christians are supposed to live.

It involves faith in the knowledge that there is something bigger than each of us that connects us to one another. Telling the truth about that connection, living into it together, is how we survive as a people—even though many of us will be injured or even killed by those who hate us for who we are.

American Christians should take note. Christianity is supposed to be about witnessing the truth that love, which we understand to be the essence of the living God, is a real and potent force in our world. We are called to make that love visible by putting our vulnerability on display.

This is what the people of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, did when they invited a stranger in to share their joy in holy scripture, and the power of that witness reverberates still.

Sadly, too many elected officials who claim to be Christian are witnessing to precisely the opposite message, selling out the most basic tenets of our faith in order to promote the sale of guns in our country.

This is as basic as it gets: encouraging people to rely on guns for our safety is blasphemous to the Christian message. The entire history of both Judaism and Christianity comes back again and again to make the point that true security rests in our reliance on God alone.

The Judeo-Christian tradition grapples almost obsessively with the human temptation to trust in something—some weapon, some empire—other than God. Virtually the entire canon of history and prophecy in Hebrew scripture and the entire narrative of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are a sustained meditation on this theme: reliance on God makes possible justice, love, life, while failure to rely on God—which is to say, fear of relying on God—breeds injustice, enmity, and death.

The women and men dancing their hearts out at Latin night at Pulse embodied the best of queer tradition; and I would argue, of Christian tradition as well. To those

Christians who doubt it, I say, "Look again."

If you open your heart and look closely at the joy, love, and sheer courage of the faces gathered in that club, you will see people who may have a great deal to teach you about the path that you are called to walk. Or better yet, to dance.