

Remembering the Pulse Night Club Shooting
Sunday, June 12, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavelly

American author, sociologist and public speaker, DaShanne Stokes says, “When a country with less than five percent of the world's population has nearly half of the world's privately owned guns and makes up nearly a third of the world's mass shootings, it's time to stop saying guns make us safer.”

What would make us safer? As I noted two weeks ago, in a recent poll it was found that “Three-quarters of Black Americans are worried that they or someone they love will be attacked because of their race,” [.Post-Ipsos poll: Strong majority of Black Americans fear attack like Buffalo supermarket shooting - The Washington Post](#). An older black man I know tells me regularly since the day that Obama was elected President that there is going to be a race war.

And since the day Obama was elected President, the right has become vocally fearful of the government. They now say they need guns not to protect against intruders but to protect again the government. In a May 28 opinion piece in the Washington Post Paul Waldman wrote, “...after the killings in Uvalde, Tex., a Florida state representative tweeted an explicit threat to kill the (current) president of the United States: ‘I have news for the embarrassment that claims to be our President — try to take our guns and you’ll learn why the Second Amendment was written in the first place.’

Waldman continues, “This idea is not unusual at all; gun advocates are forever claiming that their gun rights are the only thing that keeps America from turning into Nazi Germany. Or as Republican Senate candidate Blake Masters puts it in an ad, ‘Without gun rights, before long, you have no rights,’” [Opinion | Our gun laws were built on fantasy and terror - The Washington Post](#).

It seems everyone is scared, and everyone is shooting. On June 2 Júlia Ledur and Kate Rabinowitz reported in The Washington Post that, “There have already been more than 250 mass shootings this year in the United States, according to the Gun Violence Archive. Thirty-eight have taken place since a rampage at an elementary school in Uvalde, Tex., left 19 children and two teachers dead on May 24. Just this past weekend, mass shootings in multiple cities killed 11 and wounded more than 60.

“Mass shootings, where four or more people — not including the shooter — are injured or killed, have averaged more than one per day so far this year. Not a single week in 2022 has passed without at least four mass shootings,” [Mass shootings in 2022: U.S. sees more than 200 so far - The Washington Post](#).

Today, June 12 is the sixth anniversary of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando. “On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old man, killed 49 people and wounded 53 more in a mass shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando.... Orlando Police officers shot and killed him after a three-hour standoff....

“Pulse was hosting a “Latin Night”, and most of the victims were Latin(x). It is the deadliest incident in the history of violence against LGBT people in the United States, as well as the deadliest terrorist attack in the U.S. since the September 11 attacks in 2001, and was the deadliest mass shooting by a single gunman in U.S. history until the 2017 Las Vegas shooting,” [Orlando nightclub shooting - Wikipedia](#).

Mateen was armed with a SIG Sauer MCX semi-automatic rifle and a 9mm Glock 17 semi-automatic pistol. Two survivors quoted Mateen as saying, "I don't have a problem with black people", and that he wouldn't stop his assault until America stopped bombing his country. The FBI said Mateen told a negotiator to tell America to stop bombing Syria and Iraq and that was why he was 'out here right now.' [Orlando nightclub shooting - Wikipedia](#). It is interesting that he felt a need to say he didn't have a problem with black people as he shot at black and brown people. Why did he pick Latin night at a queer club for his rampage?

Mateen was apparently a violent person. As a probationary employee with the Florida Department of Corrections he received an administrative termination upon a warden's recommendation after Mateen joked about bringing a gun to school. He gained admission to a police academy and according to a police academy classmate, he threatened to shoot his classmates at a cookout after his hamburger touched pork in violation of Islamic dietary laws. His first wife accused him of being physically abusive, [Orlando nightclub shooting - Wikipedia](#).

But we have too many violent people in this country. Mass shootings make the news. Shootings happening every day on our city streets not so much. On June 6 Peter Hermann and Perry Stein reported in the Washington Post that, "After a shooting at a Buffalo supermarket left 10 dead, and a shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Tex., left 21 dead, including 19 students, the nation once again found itself in the throes of a debate over guns and gun violence. Hundreds of thousands of dollars poured into accounts meant for the victims and their families; the president and members of Congress vowed action.

"But in the nation's capital and other major cities, the response to everyday gun violence..., rarely sparks the outrage needed to sear the daily tragedies into the national consciousness,
'The two mass shootings that just happened gained attention around the world,' said Alvoncia Jackson Sr., a minister who eulogized her grandson at his funeral. 'They're rallying. They're marching for harder gun laws. But when it's a shooting on a city street, nothing happens. ... Nobody is standing to speak for us,'"

"In District classrooms, teachers say their students are consumed by the issue of gun violence. At Thurgood Marshall Academy in Southeast Washington, a predominantly Black school that has lost multiple students to gun violence in recent years, history teacher Karen Lee asked her students to write an end-of-the-year essay about a change they want to see in the city.

"More than half of her 17 students wrote about gun violence, calling on the government to enact laws that make guns harder to access. Lee said her students regularly come into class casually discussing shootings they heard the night before in their neighborhoods, or stray bullets that punctured their homes. 'Until our kids are safe in the city, there's not enough attention being paid to gun violence,' Lee said.

"After 17 people were killed in 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., students visited Thurgood Marshall ahead of the anti-gun-violence March for Our Lives rally. Zaire Kelly, a 16-year-old senior at Thurgood Marshall, had been killed in a robbery on the way home from an SAT prep class the year prior; the Parkland teens were hoping to learn more about the violence that afflicts Southeast Washington.

'The students went in pretty skeptical about what these White kids were saying,' Lee said. 'But they instantly found ways to relate to each other beyond just this trauma. They created powerful moments and connections where both really understood the impact of gun violence in a much fuller way,'" [Amid high-profile shootings, those affected by routine gun crime feel ignored - The Washington Post](#).

I said earlier I know an older black man who says a race war is coming. The right is saying they need guns to protect themselves against our government, which for the last two administrations has included a person of color in the Presidency or Vice-Presidency. Our children are killing each other in the streets. Almost every time I talk to my mother, she says the world is a mess and she is praying that Jesus will come back soon and make everything right. None of this is working for me, but I do need things to change. One of you recently gave me a different frame, not that a race war is coming or that we need a Messiah to save us but that what we need is a Renaissance.

The European Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries began after the crisis of the late Middle Ages a time when there was plague, famine, climate change, and wars. Sound familiar?

I am all for better laws regulating the sale and use of guns, but I also want to find a way to completely change our society's way of thinking. I want us to go to the movies not to see Terminator or Maverick or Rambo, not even to see comic heroes who save the day with kapows and kablamms, but to see stories where the day is won by wits and friendship. As Edwin Markham wrote, "He drew a circle that shut me out — Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in!"

Years ago, at a Methodist church I remember conversations with a young adult leader of the youth group. He was reading apocalyptic novels of the end times and was all excited that the time was coming when he would be in the Lord's army and fight against the denizens of Satan. It was rather disconcerting, and not long after I began my journey into Unitarian Universalism. Universalism. That is the side of our heritage that I believe needs emphasis today. We are one people. Celebrate being Latinx. Let your queer flag fly. Raise your fist for black power. Celebrate your Scotch, German, Japanese, Persian heritage. But also know that we are one.

Marge Piercy wrote, "Two people can keep each other sane, can give support, conviction, love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation, a committee, a wedge. With four you can play bridge and start an organization. With six you can rent a whole house, eat pie for dinner with no seconds, and hold a fund raising party. A dozen make a demonstration. A hundred fill a hall. A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter; ten thousand, power and your own paper; a hundred thousand, your own media; ten million, your own country.

“It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.”

Thirty-one people affiliated with the white nationalist group Patriot Front were arrested near an annual LGBTQ+ event Saturday in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, [31 linked to white nationalist group arrested near Pride event in Idaho \(nbcnews.com\)](#). Hate doesn't seem to stick to one kind of hate. Hate for people of color, hate for people in the lgbtq+ community, hate of women. They often seem to come together.

We can have our crowd, our race, our religion but mine are not in competition or at war with yours nor yours with mine. In the end, in my Renaissance, there is a big universal “We” not multitudinous factions of us and them. This is what I want to teach the children and you and myself. Don't shoot, instead take my hand. There will still be places like Latin night at the queer club to celebrate every aspect of who you are, but they will not be there because there are too many unsafe places to be you. All the world will be safe for everyone everywhere. We have a far way to go to get there, but it is never going to happen unless I and others who feel the way I do work to make it so.

There are too many dead but on this anniversary of the Pulse night club shooting let us remember those killed there as we commit ourselves to the work needed to bring peace to our violent world.

Stanley Almodovar III, 23
Amanda Alvear, 25
Oscar A. Aracena-Montero, 26
Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala, 33
Alejandro Barrios Martinez, 21
Martin Benitez Torres, 33
Antonio D. Brown, 30
Darryl R. Burt II, 29
Jonathan A. Camuy Vega, 24
Angel L. Candelario-Padro, 28
Simon A. Carrillo Fernandez, 31
Juan Chevez-Martinez, 25
Luis D. Conde, 39
Cory J. Connell, 21
Tevin E. Crosby, 25
Franky J. Dejesus Velazquez, 50
Deonka D. Drayton, 32
Mercedez M. Flores, 26
Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz, 22
Juan R. Guerrero, 22
Paul T. Henry, 41
Frank Hernandez, 27
Miguel A. Honorato, 30
Javier Jorge-Reyes, 40

Jason B. Josaphat, 19
Eddie J. Justice, 30
Anthony L. Laureano Disla, 25
Christopher A. Leinonen, 32
Brenda L. Marquez McCool, 49
Jean C. Mendez Perez, 35
Akyra Monet Murray, 18
Kimberly Morris, 37
Jean C. Nieves Rodriguez, 27
Luis O. Ocasio-Capo, 20
Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez, 25
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36
Joel Rayon Paniagua, 32
Enrique L. Rios Jr., 25
Juan P. Rivera Velazquez, 37
Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan, 24
Christopher J. Sanfeliz, 24
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado, 35
Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez, 25
Edward Sotomayor Jr., 34
Shane E. Tomlinson, 33
Leroy Valentin Fernandez, 25
Luis S. Vielma, 22
Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, 37
Jerald A. Wright, 31

In memory of these and so many others lost to gun violence may we commit ourselves to finding the way to peace. It is written in the Torah, "I call heaven and earth to witness today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, Deuteronomy 30. Amen.