

I am the Rev. Shelly Davis, pastor of East Congregational Church of Milton, United Church of Christ, an Open and Affirming community of faith that chooses to welcome, embrace, love, and celebrate our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight, queer and questioning members, friends, sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, siblings—God’s own children, God’s own people—every single one.

I also stand before you tonight as a member of the Milton Interfaith Clergy Association, one of this event’s co-sponsors, along with the Milton Board of Selectmen.

Even though I represent two of these three communities tonight, these words are mine and mine alone, and they come from the depth of my own personal journey as an out lesbian who has wrestled with and continues to wrestle with my own Christian faith tradition to extract the blessing I know God intends for God’s people.

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I know what it feels like inside a gay night club. That mix of excitement, acceptance, possibility, pulsing to the beat of dance tune after dance tune. It feels safe, and reassuring, and joyful, and life-giving—until now.

Last Sunday night’s killing spree at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando is an abomination in the sight of God and to any human being with even the faintest ethical heartbeat. Such an act is heinous, abhorrent, unconscionable.

We gather here in grief, in mourning, in shock.

We lament:

- the enormous loss of life—much of it young, most of it Latino, all of it queer, all of it American

We lament:

- the even larger number of those wounded—many of them young, most of them Latino, all of it queer, all of it American

We lament:

- the shattered families,

We lament:

- the torrent of readily available assault weapons—“in guns we trust”—the stock of two American gun manufacturers *rose* 7% on Monday

We lament:

- the grotesque distortion of a religion whose very name, Islam, in Arabic, is related to peace, in this its most holy month of Ramadan

We lament:

- the pain and prison and persistence of homophobia,

We lament:

- the rivers of racism that rage unabated in our land,

We lament:

- the torn fabric of our social compact to be, and continue to become, a nation that actually *lives* the inscription on that famed icon of American history, the Liberty Bell:

"PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND  
UNTO *ALL* THE INHABITANTS THEREOF"

(which happens to be a quote from the book of **Leviticus** chapter 25, verse 10)

Yes, we lament. We mourn deeply.

*And that is NOT ENOUGH.*

We gather tonight because we must begin again. We must begin again to recall and reclaim the strength and beauty that come from our diversity.

WE ARE MILTON:

- We are white and we are black.
- We are Latino and we are Asian.
- We are old and we are young.
- We are gay and we are straight and we are transgender.
- We are rich and we are poor.
- We are people with disabilities and we are able-bodied people.
- We are people with mental health and people with mental health challenges.
- We are Christian and we are atheist and we are Jewish and we are Muslim and we are Buddhist.
- We are Republican and Democratic and Independent and Green Party members.
- We are immigrants and descendants of immigrants from many lands, and we are descendants of this land's indigenous peoples.
- We are Americans.

WE ARE MILTON.

*Together*—we are the ones who must weave and reweave the fabric of this community, this commonwealth, this nation, this human family into one cloth.

We are Milton; tonight we are Orlando; and we are America.

And *together*, this night, we declare again that no single act of extremist violence in Orlando, or in Charleston—but one year ago, will deter our resolve to create and nurture a community and a nation filled with communities—communities of many faiths, communities of many colors, queer communities, intergenerational and integrated communities—communities that celebrate diversity while doing the hard work—day by day, bit by bit, person to person, face to face—of acknowledging one another, living side by side, respecting one another, and demonstrating that *love wins* when we see and know ourselves deeply connected—soul to soul—*then* we will be one.

***May it be so.***