

#Orlando Pulse Shooting Vigil Speech, 13 June 2016

By [Katy Jon Went](#)

If killing 50 LGBT people and maiming as many is your response to witnessing a kiss, an expression of love, between two people of the same sex, then you need help not hate, to get open minded not offended, and a change of religious interpretation. I can't help but think there might have been some internalised homophobia going on besides mental health, anger and other issues already raked up by media, before this individual jumped on the ISIS bandwagon to tag his heinous act.

We forget that London, Brighton and elsewhere have had their own homophobic atrocities, that were not done in the name of ISIS, that Los Angeles Pride just had another violent attack on it averted, nothing to do with alleged Islamic extremism, that Prides in Israel have seen LGBT people attacked and killed by Jewish Orthodox extremism. There is no place for ill-informed Islamophobia now - people of all faiths and none, Communists and Fascists in recent history, have all targeted LGBT people.

Anger is no less a legitimate response than many others at this time. Forgiveness, albeit a healing one, can never be asked or expected of anyone unless freely given and only by the victims and their loved ones. Understanding, love, mercy, and worldwide calls for an end to homophobic judgement and violence are needed, people to challenge bad religious interpretation and attitudes, and show better alternatives. I'm pleased that many faith groups march with Pride, and historically just one small one, against it, here in Norwich.

Religious groups are all over themselves with prayers at the moment but no recognition of the hypocrisy that their slowness to accept LGBT people counts towards the fear and hate that drives confused and conflicted people to carry out these acts. The victims don't need prayer they need acceptance, the only justice would be churches, mosques and temples overturning their hitherto homophobic attitudes, policies and doctrines. This may sound offensive but so was Jesus. Prayer without doctrinal change and better practice right now is like blessing the homeless with words but not with a blanket and some food. People of faith need to offer more than prayers right now.

I'll put my hand up in the air, 30 years ago I was a fundamentalist Christian, opposed gay rights etc, years later several members of my University Christian Union, that I'd helped found, came out as gay or lesbian. My views changed, when I had my own coming out and Damascene conversion to LGBT acceptance. Others can too.

Will we see the same international condemnation and responses as in Paris? I doubt it, as the victims were LGBT.

Amidst the EU referendum debate, US presidential campaign and escalating immigration and Islamophobia issues, we don't need blanket condemnations but change. People in the US and UK have hijacked Orlando as an excuse to condemn migrants, religion etc, but not to call it homophobia.

Hate and fear need naming but the responses need to be love and, out and proud confidence.

As Martin Luther King said:

"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."