

?We will not allow fear to rob us of our Pride?



Four-year-old Dexter Hamilton, son of Philip Hamilton, Lay Pastoral Minister at Aurora's Trinity Anglican Church, sits on his dad's shoulders at Sunday night's vigil in Toronto for the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida. Submitted photo

By Philip Hamilton
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Special to The Auroran

With vigil candles and rainbow flags in hand, my partner, children and I gathered with thousands in Toronto to mourn the loss of so many LGBTQ lives in the wake of the tragic hate crime at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando on June 11.

As a religious leader in this community, I am especially aware of the important tradition of building and preserving places of sanctuary.

Throughout the ages, humans have set apart safe gathering places to hallow them as sacred spaces, and for many in the LGBTQ community, nightclubs like Pulse have become the only place of authentic sanctuary.

For as long as we live in a world where many are rejected by our families, excommunicated from our churches, cast out of our synagogues, excluded from our mosques, and even hated by some in our communities, it is still risky to publicly come out as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer person.

In the coming days, I will mourn the lives that were violently ended this week in Orlando, and I will also grieve a desecration of sanctuary.

There must be a reason that hate-filled individuals so often prey upon the vulnerability of a gathered community ? it must be the same reason that a white supremacist targeted the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, murdering nine black people during a prayer service; the same reason that a neo-nazi walked into a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin with a loaded automatic-weapon and opened fire, killing six peaceful worshippers; and the same reason that one homophobic extremist with an assault rifle chose to kill 49 LGBTQ people while they were dancing in a celebration of Pride.

I grieve the desecration of these sanctuaries, as they were being defiled by bullets, profaned by human hatred. This is why we must collectively create and protect more safe spaces; we must ensure that our children have access to inclusive and affirming communities where they can thrive; and we must protect every holy place where people gather to celebrate our shared humanity.



Philip Hamilton, Associate Minister of Aurora's Trinity Anglican Church, left, with Aurora United Church Minister Andy Comar, lead the opening of Sunday's joint service at Town Park. Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

When we got home from the vigil to tuck our four and five-year old sons into bed, somehow things hit a little closer to home. Should we fear for their safety this year at Pride celebrations?

Should fear dictate the sanctuaries that we avoid?

Should fear undo the progress that our society has made toward inclusion?

No, we will not allow fear to rob us of our Pride; rather we will march on confident that love wins.

It is natural to fear that which we do not know or understand, but it is crucial at this time to stand alongside every minority that is overlooked in our community.

It is especially important in the coming days to not allow fear to fill the void, as some media outlets and politicians seek to blame this horrific hate-crime on mental illness or certain religious ideals.

However, as Premier Kathleen Wynne said to the crowds gathered in Toronto on Sunday night, "homophobia cannot be fought with islamophobia."

Hatred cannot be cured with more hatred.

It is the way of active remembrance that invites people to hear and experience the narratives of both heartache and freedom. Tragedy can be redeemed to reactivate creative imaginations that together can dream of a brighter future, and rebuild our sanctuaries.

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Here in Aurora, we have created two memorial sites for the victims of the attack at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. If you need somewhere to pray or meditate, to leave flowers or to light a vigil candle, or simply to find sanctuary, everyone is welcome to visit these memorial sites: indoors at the Historic Chapel at Trinity Anglican Church (79 Victoria Street), or outdoors at the green lot where Aurora United Church once stood at Yonge and Tyler Streets.