

In The Wake of Orlando by Fr. Bill Terry

I wish I could say that we planned an inter-faith service for the victims of violence in Orlando. But we did not. What we did do was say “yes.” Being engaged as a Christian is sometimes less about planning mission, planning how we act as Christians and much more about living in an environment that presents opportunities for compassion, action, and devotion. Such was the case on Sunday afternoon at the Friendly Bar.

Vicki and I were attending a birthday bash for Rusty at the Friendly Bar Sunday June 12th. I got a call and went into the street to get away from the noise and laughter. I want you to know that before the party began Don called the bar to order and asked for a time of silence recognizing the events of the weekend and the “Pulse” victims. So, there was that.

It was Max on the phone asking if Forum for Equality and HRC could stage a “vigil” for the victims of the Pulse shootings. “Yes” was the answer and yes without qualification. I had planned Monday off but it just was not to be. I did take the morning but by noon Monday the media, the Mayor, and social networks were abuzz. Luigi was fielding calls and making calls and really he was the force behind what happened.

By 6:00 p.m. we had a choir singing with volunteers and drop in voices and our own cadre of personnel. Jimbo and Janna and Darryl, without hesitation, said yes to an invitation to sing. Songs were selected and the choir sang their hearts out. It was an important part of the liturgy.

Liturgy? Well yes what we did was unscripted in many ways ... it was about showing up. We simply lined clergy up and gave a line up to speak and places to sing. We did set up a candle lighting which always adds a sense of the holy.

By 6:30 p.m. a procession started with A Sikh and his wife; MCC Pastor; RC Deacon; RC Priest; Lutheran Pastor; Methodist Pastor speaking Spanish; two lovely Sufi women; and Imam; and me. We came following the Pascal Candle. Each spoke including the Mayor and representatives of Forum for Equality and Human Rights Campaign. Words of compassion, inclusion, justice, and healing were spoken by all. I almost wept when the Sufi women, with trembling voices and tears prayed to Allah for peace – it was powerful.

Even with media all over the place the approximately 500 visitors began to feel and to weep and to smile and to say “we count” and to make a safe place so to do. The real healing, the true heart of what happened on that extraordinary evening was simply three things:

A safe place to gather that provided a sense of the holy.

The gathering itself: human companionship in community was the heart of healing.

And affirmation that said, “LGBTQ lives matter.”