

# How Should Christians Respond to the Orlando Massacre?

“The deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.” These words bring fear, hate, exclusion, injustice, hurt, shock and pain.

The victims have been stereotyped, lumped into a reason for such a massacre. The shooter has been stereotyped as well, and, for some, his religious convictions offer explanation.

I am praying for those who are injured and fighting for their lives. I am praying for the families who have lost people they love.

I am praying for Orlando that seeks to understand what took place. I am praying for this country and other countries that live in fear.

We are afraid. A man brings a book bag into worship, sets it down and walks out of the sanctuary.

We are afraid. Schools seek to protect their children with security that no 60-year-old can fathom.

People should be free to see a movie, dance at a club and gather together with any crowd of others that they know or do not know and still feel secure. We are afraid.

We are being sold a bill of goods by the media (you choose your media outlet - TV, Facebook, newspapers, radio talk show) that we must choose a side.

Muslim, gay, Christian, straight, Republican, Democrat, pro-weapon, gun-control are not topics of discussion, but are sides we are implored to take. If we do not “take a stand,” we are demonized.

It took less than 12 hours for extremists to respond with rhetoric about what the president said or did not say, what some preachers proclaimed as sinful, and how we should fear diversity.

Each extremist - whether Christian, Muslim, gay, straight, gun activist or gun

controller - instilled fear. We are afraid.

So many times, when a messenger of God speaks in Scripture, we hear these words, "Do not be afraid."

When we respond with fear, we categorize people like the Dewey Decimal System at the library - judging a book by its cover.

Or we come up with simple solutions that will make little difference, or we pray and move on without feeling.

Or we go home locking our doors, seeking refuge and secretly thanking our God that it was not us who was directly affected by the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.

I asked the deacons at First Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia, how we should respond to what took place in Orlando early Sunday morning, June 11, 2016. They responded, "We should respond with love."

We cannot be silent. We must pray for the people of Orlando and those affected by this tragedy. Most of them voiced that they believe the answer is not about sexual preference or gun laws or religious extremism.

They believe in the love of God that is relevant in this world today as we follow Jesus. They believe we can actually make a difference in the U.S. and the world if we continue to respond with love.

I am with them. Love conquers fear. Love wins.

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