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Pastoral statement concerning the Mass Shooting Incident in Orlando, Florida, USA

*“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God, he created them.”
(Genesis 1:27, NRSV).*

All too often, in this broken world, we fail to see the image of God in the other. While the LWF Council met in Lutherstadt Wittenberg 15-21 June 2016, we were reminded again of the persistence of sin, in situations named and unnamed, such as the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, USA.

In the early morning hours of June 12, 2016 a man, later identified as a Muslim American, entered a club known as a place of gathering for the LGBT community in Orlando, killing 49 people and wounding more than 50 others.

So many issues come together in this one horrific incident – hate crime, gun violence, and marginalization of people because of sexual orientation or religious identification. Sadly, the tragedy is compounded by uncivil discourse that manipulates fear and divides people.

We live in an increasingly divided and polarized world. Too often we separate ourselves into like-minded groups and sort others out. It is a short distance from division to demonization. On June 12th we witnessed the tragic consequences of this rift in the human family.

There is another way. God’s deep and gracious love, demonstrated by the death and resurrection of Christ, has reconciled the world to God’s self. God invites us into this reconciling work. It is the love that binds us all together. All of humanity is connected by this love. In God’s love there is no “other”, only children created in the image of God.

As members of the Lutheran World Federation we must examine ourselves, individually and as a communion, to acknowledge the ways we have divided and been divided. We must stand with people who have been “othered”. We must speak justice, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

We stand against acts of retaliation against the Muslim community now and in days to come. And we must continue to communicate God's love even to those who are compelled by hate and fear.

We continue to pray for the families of the slain and of the shooter, for the wounded, for the LGBT community, and for the Muslim community that faces the threat of retaliation. And we pray that the Prince of Peace will bring us all to the day when we stop the bloodshed.