



**Catholic Committee of Appalachia
STATEMENT ON
ORLANDO LGBTQ MASSACRE**

June 22, 2016

*“Put your sword back in its sheath,
for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”
(Mt. 26:52)*

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia mourns deeply and stands unwaveringly with the LGBTQ community worldwide, accompanying all in the wake of last week’s horrific deaths and trauma in the Pulse club in Orlando, Florida.

CCA honestly acknowledges that, “even mainstream churches have served as havens of discrimination,”¹ and Pope Francis insists that thoughtless or unkind words can lead to different forms and degrees of violence. “If our hearts are closed, if our hearts are made of stone, the stones find their way into our hands and we are ready to throw them.”² We commend our Appalachian bishops (from Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Lexington) and others who have directly addressed Catholic complicity in this tragedy, and we call all church leaders, further, to specify and condemn the mass shooting as an act of hatred and violence towards our LGBTQ sisters and brothers.

Our prayers for the victims and survivors, and deepest condolences to the families and friends of lost loved ones, join the countless others. Though, as we pray, we cannot overlook the perceived enemy, the shooter himself, Omar Mateen. Indeed, Omar, and those like him, are pitiable children of God, so tortured by furious revulsion that grotesque mass murder must seem to them to be their only relief from despair. We are also aware of the potential for this violent act to contribute to increasing Islamophobic sentiments, and we pray that Christians remain steadfast in welcoming immigrants and refugees from all countries. It is sobering to remember, as a Jesuit priest recently observed, that “if he used ISIS and a distorted vision of his own Islamic tradition to make his own feelings seem part of something greater, he only follows in the footsteps of those who have similarly twisted Christianity and spoken of themselves as defenders of Western civilization.”³ Therefore, Catholic Committee of Appalachia resolves to combine our ongoing prayers with actions just as inexhaustible, seeking to end the behaviors, unmasking the distortions of religious belief, and changing the laws that allow any and all such slaughtering to occur.

¹ Catholic Committee of Appalachia, *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us* (Spencer, WV: Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 2015), p. 24, available at <http://www.ccappal.org/thetellingtakesushome2015.pdf>.

² See <http://popefrancisjourney.com/category/judgement>.

³ See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/john-d-whitney-sj/i-prayed-today-for-the-shooter/10157149940670389>.