

Personal Testimony from Chaplain Sherry Barger
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Pulse Incident, Orlando Florida
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Who lives, who dies and who tells your story? Hamilton won 11 Tony Awards!
And I didn't even know!

I was not at my Tony Awards viewing party with my tribe of Broadway enthusiast friends last Sunday night ...instead... I was a block away from ORMC -working side by side with other resources in coordinating the Interim Family Intake Center located at the Hampton Inn in downtown Orlando.

The families of the victims were shell shocked and confused as they trickled in from area hospitals. We worked fervently to gather the information that we needed from them to match their loved ones identities to those on the known hospital lists, the medical examiners lists and the joint FBI/FDLE lists. We were thorough and methodical so the minutes seemed to crawl by at a snails pace But the hard truth was---we couldn't get this wrong. A false death notification or a promise of false hope was not an option!

We did our very best to extend love and light during a very dark time in my beautiful hometown. We provided emotional, spiritual and medical support to all of the 100 plus registered families and friends that came in search of their loved ones believed to be at Pulse on Saturday night.

James Welch, the manager of the Hampton Inn, allowed us to commandeer his office to privately identify, verify and then notify families as information was validated, matched and then reconfirmed. The Hampton Inn provided private meeting spaces for difficult conversations and helped to accommodate space for the victim advocates, mental health resources, local Clergy and Chaplains. I want to be crystal clear at this point- Every faith practice that we requested assistance from came to the aid of our local families at the Hampton Inn including Priests, Pastors, Bishops, Imams, Sheiks, Gurus, Reverends etc... ALL of the Faith leaders worked collectively for the greater good and towards aggressively meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of our local families regardless of it they were a part of their own particular faith practice.

Orlando's finest Law Enforcement along with every type of First Responders assisted as difficult information was given to these hurting families! Several needed Medical assistance as the painful information was provided to them. We all know the numbers - 49 killed -dozens wounded-millions asking why? Hundreds of family members were grieving... Along with our staff, our city, our nation, and our globe.

I missed seeing Hamilton win 11 Tony Awards on Sunday night but I lived and experienced a portion of the elegant acceptance speech made by its creator Lin-

Manuel Miranda. He said:

We rise and fall and light from dying embers, remembrances that hope and love last longer

And love is love it cannot be killed or swept aside.

My prayer is borrowed tonight because I'm exhausted and because his words were perfect.

Good night and God Bless

Evening Prayer: Father God, tonight I am praying that you will comfort those who have lost loved ones, friends from senseless violence. I pray specifically for the families and friends of those who lost their lives. I pray for healing and recovery for those who are fighting to survive. God I pray that you will comfort them, that you will reassure them that you are still in control and they are loved by you. God I pray that we all may continue to have faith in you and your promises, even when we don't understand why this happens, even when we are angry that this happens, even when we are overcome with fear and sadness, God help us continue to trust in you. God I pray for peace during this time. I pray for healing for the city of Orlando and all cities that are dealing with violence that takes the innocent. Comfort those left without brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, friends, mates, partners and children due to this violence. God send your comfort to them as they mourn and remember their loved ones. I thank you for hearing my prayer. In Your name I pray, Amen

Sherry Barger