Opinion
NCR Voices



The damaged windows are boarded up at Annunciation Catholic Church after Wednesday's school shooting, Thursday, Aug. 28, 2025, in Minneapolis. (AP photo/Abbie Parr)



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Some evil is beyond identity. On Wednesday morning (Aug. 27) in Minneapolis, Robin Westman traveled to Annunciation Catholic Church and opened fire through the windows at children praying during Mass, killing two and injuring more. Investigators believe Westman posted racist and violent messages on YouTube. In addition, in 2020, Westman's mother filed a legal name change form that stated the "minor child identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Other than that record filed in a county court in Minnesota, we don't know exactly how Westman identified, though it is an indication the assailant might have identified as transgender.

Observing how quick some were to immediately denounce the apparent trans identity based on the actions of one individual, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said, "Anybody who is using this as an opportunity to villainize our trans community ... has lost their sense of common humanity."

As a transgender person, the news is heartbreaking to me. Not just because of the senseless and tragic deaths and injuries — though that can't be overstated — but also because of the way some on the right use news like this to support their claims that trans people must be "eradicated" from public life. Watching the internet explode with hatred towards a marginalized community already suffering from historically anti-trans legislation is gut-wrenching. And it's not just words — moments like these risk fueling retaliatory violence against innocent trans people, and give fresh momentum to those already pushing to roll back our basic human rights.

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We've been here before; like when Genesse Ivonne Moreno opened fire at a Houston megachurch last year, and the far right adamantly created a witch hunt to prove Moreno was trans. She was not. Trans identities have become a scapegoat in the public conversation on mass shootings, when the reality is that white people radicalized by extremist pipelines, and their easy access to guns, are a much more

obvious denominator. We have seen the rise of these (mostly male) shooters, young white men radicalized online, and yet their violence has not been leveraged to smear the identity of their entire demographic.

It is also crucial to say plainly: Being transgender is not a mental illness. Like cisgender people, some trans people experience mental health struggles, often made worse by stigma, prejudice and the lack of accessible support. The Trump administration's removal of LGBTQ-specific suicide prevention hotlines was just one example of how hostility to queer and trans lives directly worsens these outcomes. Ignoring these realities puts lives at risk.

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The double standard is sickening, but so too is the silence of so-called allies. So, please, if you consider yourself a friend to the trans community: Now is the time we need to hear your voice. We need to know that you respect who we are, understand that we are all individuals, and are willing to speak up when our human rights are threatened. Silence is complicity. We are the canaries in the coal mine: After they come for us, they will come for others. What matters now is whether our allies will meet this moment with courage, clarity and an unshakable refusal to let hate define our future.

This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. View the full series.