

Opening Remarks from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling at the United to Love Rally

Good afternoon beloved. My name is Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling and I serve the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church. I am here with my husband, the Rev. Marion Easterling, Jr., the Executive Leadership Team, Cabinet and staff of our conference, faithful and faith-filled partners, United Methodists from across our region and ecumenical clergy leaders and together we thank you for joining this grace-filled gathering.

I want to take a moment to recognize Rev. Dr. Stacey Cole Wilson who was the first to hear my vision for today's witness and jumped into action as only a skilled servant worker of God can. The fruit of her work is all around you today.

On Aug. 12, 2017, Jason Kessler secured a permit to hold a Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA. During that gathering Heather Heyer lost her life, and liberty for all was denounced through divisive and demonic rhetoric of suppression and supremacy. Mr. Kessler sought another permit this year, but was denied access. He then decided to bring that message of bigotry, racism and exclusion to Maryland. As I became aware of this intent, I learned of those working to deny him access to a permit. I unequivocally rejected that position. I believe if his rights and those he supports can be abridged, our rights and those we represent can be abridged as well. Rather, I sought to organize a gathering of peace, love and justice so strong that the numbers in attendance would overwhelm their gathering. I concur with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he stated, "Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

In our great nation there are 954 known hate groups. There are countless and untold acts of hatred in our country every day. One is too many, so we deeply lament the propagation of violence and the propaganda of hate. The membership of hate groups continues to increase as too many believe the false narrative of jobs stolen, borders invaded, crime increasing and hope decreasing. The narrative is false and serves only to inculcate a doctrine of otherness. These domestic terrorists are pandering fear -- but we have gathered to dispel fear.

We are gathered in the name of Love.

We are gathered in the name of Peace.

We are gathered in the name of Justice.

We are gathered in the name of all that is good, righteous, holy, sanctified and true.

Let me be clear, we are not a protest group; rather, we are the children of the Living God;

They march with torches of hate, we stand with the Light of God.

They spew a rhetoric of rancor, we proclaim a message of love.

They work for oppression, ethnic separatism and racial dominance,

We labor for liberation, restoration and unity.

They stand on a platform of racist rhetoric, we stand on the precepts of all sacred writs.

May we understand that this is our work! There is no one exempt from this work of repentance, healing, dismantling or working to overcome racism. The evil of hatred did not begin last year, with the new administration, or even last century. It began in this nation when persons arrived and took the land from indigenous persons. When they were lied to, abused, murdered, and removed from their land. It began with the Trail of Tears and continued as they were placed on what we call reservations and their oppressors tried to take their language, way of life and even religion from them. No one is exempt. This is our work.

As we gather, sing, pray, proclaim and witness, we do so with hearts of peace and not hearts of war. We implore all those who will participate today to remember our purpose and uphold the banner of peace, love and justice.

Thank you for your time.

Thank you for your prayers.

Thank you for your presence.

Thank you for your witness.

Thank you for your courage.

Thank you for your perseverance.

Thank you for your love.

Repeat after me:

We are united to love!

We are united to love

We are united to love!

Amen and amen.