



Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

EPISCOPAL LEADER

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Bishop Easterling's statement in response to the Trump Administration's actions in Washington

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13: 34-35 (NRSV)

If I speak with eloquence in earth's many languages, and in the heavenly tongues of angels, yet I didn't express myself with love, my words would be reduced to the hollow sound of nothing more than clanging cymbals. And if I were to have the gift of prophecy with a profound understanding of God's hidden secrets, and if I possessed unending supernatural knowledge, and if I had the greatest gift of faith that could move mountains, but have never learned to love, then I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-2 (The Passion Translation)

As people of The Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, which includes the District of Columbia, we affirm the sacred principles of local self-determination, shared responsibility for public safety, and the dignity of all who call our city home. As Christ-followers, we affirm that every person is created in the image of God, bearing inestimable worth that cannot be erased. This truth means no one is expendable, no life is disposable, and no person takes precedence over another. But as events have unfolded within our nation's capital, this is not the lived experience of all within the United States of America.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once spoke of "two Americas." He explained that although individuals lived within the same country, their experiences were vastly different. In one America, there was opportunity, abundance, and the presumption of dignity. In the other, there was poverty, marginalization, and the constant shadow of state power used to intimidate. Looking at the District of Columbia today, it feels as though those two Americas have never been more visible.

In one America, some walk freely through streets lined with monuments to liberty, confident that their rights will be protected. In the other, unhoused neighbors huddle under bridges and in alleyways, navigating not only hunger and exposure, but also the heavy presence of National Guard troops and a federalized Washington Metropolitan Police Department. In one America, some believe youthful offenders should be charged as adults to dissuade criminal behavior. In the other, there is a call for more programs aimed at creating greater opportunities for our youth. In one America, some are rejoicing in the administration's policies and practices. In the other, those same policies and practices are experienced as a weight of injustice.

The Trump Administration has justified Federal intervention in the District by espousing data that is heavily contested ([Washington D.C. crime statistics](#)) and painting a picture of rampant “crime, bloodshed, bedlam and squalor and worse.” An intervention imposed without the request of Mayor Bowser. Some welcome this show of force as necessary to restore order and avert crime, while others experience it as a narrative of fear, lending cover to the federalization of local governance. For some, this is protection; for others, it is intrusion. Our polarization is often driven by the lens through which these actions are either defended or denounced, the lens of politics.

But as people of faith, our lens must always be through the teachings of Jesus Christ and the commandment to love. We are commanded to love, not with sentimentality, but with courage and tangible acts of transformation.

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church also compel us to resist abuses of power and to stand alongside the most vulnerable. Therefore, we reject any use of force that treats God’s children as inconvenient eyesores or threats, rather than as beloved siblings. Public policy must be measured not by the comfort of the powerful, but by the care afforded to the least of these.

Housing is not a privilege for the fortunate; it is a God-given right grounded in human dignity. Caring for the unhoused is not an optional act of kindness; it is a moral imperative. It embodies the love commanded by Christ. To ignore this truth is to turn our faith into an empty clanging cymbal.

There is a more excellent way. A way that creates rather than destroys; that affords opportunity rather than creating criminal histories. Across our Baltimore-Washington Conference, churches are building affordable housing, opening our doors to provide hospitality, meals, and shelter, mentoring youth, and collaborating to bring healthcare to the underserved. We are repurposing property to serve the community. We are also working with D.C.- area churches and ecumenical partners to provide more resources for our unhoused neighbors, additional programs for youth, and opportunities for advocacy. This is the Church at its best, meeting human need with Christ’s love, without condition or reservation.

Let us collaboratively leverage our resources, not for walls or weapons, but for bread and shelter. Let our sanctuaries be centers of compassion. Let our hands and feet be instruments of justice. And let our witness to the love of Christ be so steadfast, so radiant, that it banishes fear and dismantles falsehood.

We cannot heal the “two Americas” without the courage to live as one Body in Christ. Let us, therefore, go and be the Church.

Blessings and peace,
Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling
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