

BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*Bishop LaTrelle Easterling*

BISHOP, WASHINGTON EPISCOPAL AREA

REV. ANTOINE C. LOVE *Assistant to the Bishop*

JOYCE A. KING *Administrative Assistant to the Bishop*

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Beloved,

Once again, I am combing Scripture for another passage I can use to address a senseless death. Once again, I am trying to come to grips with the hatred that leads to the death of another innocent human being. Once again, I am wiping my tears and the tears of those who grieve and mourn these deaths; who live in fear because of them; and who simply wonder when we will stop killing one another. Once again...

In the predawn hours of Saturday, May 20, Richard Collins, III, was stabbed and killed as he waited for a bus on the University of Maryland, College Park campus. Reports indicate that he was there visiting friends, and in no way provoked the attack. At this time, it is believed that Sean Urbansky, a University of Maryland student, approached Collins, ordered him to "step left" and when Collins did not, stabbed him in the chest. Collins was set to graduate today from Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland. Last week he was commissioned into the United States Army as a second lieutenant. Urbansky is reportedly a member of an Alt-Reich group on Facebook, a group that espouses hatred toward women and people of color.

I offer my sincere condolences to the Collins family, their friends, and the students of Bowie State. We are in prayer that God provides them with strength, courage, and healing. It is unnatural for parents to bury their children. We surround this family with love and comfort as they plan a funeral when they should be attending a graduation.

As the mother of two African-American young men, I ache at the notion that their race could be enough to provoke a vicious attack. In the words of Rev. Traci Blackman, "It is impossible to be unarmed when my blackness is the weapon you fear." We have taught them not to run in public for fear they will be thought to have committed a crime; we have taught them how to drive while black; we have taught them to never place their hands in their pockets when they are in a store for fear they will be accused of shoplifting; we have taught them how to respond if approached by law enforcement officials for fear they will be deemed disrespectful. We have taught them everything we can think of about how to live in America, as citizens, and be safe. How do you protect your children against the hatred of others?

In times like this we are reminded that we, as Christ-followers, cannot grow weary in spreading the love of God, the Word of God, and the grace of God. It is our baptismal duty to spread peace, love, and reconciliation as long as we have breath. Therefore, I also pray for Sean Urbansky and those who are imprisoned by hatred and fear. May they encounter the risen Lord and be transformed by the cleansing love of a loving God.

Members and friends of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, may the words attributed to our founder, John Wesley, inspire us today, "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can."

Blessings and peace,

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling