



1500 16th Street, NW • Washington, DC 20036  
tel 202.332.4010 • fax 202.332.4035  
www.foundryumc.org

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Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling  
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church  
11711 East Market Place  
Fulton, MD 20759

Dear Bishop Easterling,

We at Foundry United Methodist Church welcomed your election to the episcopacy and your appointment to the Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC). We celebrate that you are the first woman to serve as our conference's bishop. The Foundry community has been looking forward to having you preach at our church since you were appointed as our episcopal leader, and we are thankful that you will lead us in worship on July 15.

Since your arrival in the BWC, Foundry members, staff, and clergy have proudly participated and prayed in shared ministry alongside you here in Washington and around the conference. Together, we have spoken out against racism and gun violence and we've reminded those in power of God's call for us to welcome immigrants in our society. At Foundry, we've been encouraged when you have shared your passion for social justice and your commitment, most recently in your statement on May 31, that you support full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons in the life of The United Methodist Church.

Rooted in scripture, we at Foundry believe we are called by God to prophetic witness. And we believe that Christ stands on the side of the sacred worth of all people, including LGBTQ United Methodists. We believe that justice too long delayed is justice denied.

Foundry has a rich 203-year-old history that includes being a leading Reconciling Congregation since 1995. We have been involved in the ongoing debate over the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the UMC for years. We have been present at General Conferences, Jurisdictional Conferences and church trials to bear witness to the inclusive love of God. We have invited national leaders in the movement for LGBTQ justice to our church, our classrooms, and our pulpit. We have scoured the Bible, *The Book of Discipline* and the work of academic and legal experts for guidance in these matters. And we have prayed long and hard to discern God's call for us and the church on these issues.

At Annual Conference, Rev. Dr. Shively Smith, a friend of Foundry Church and the leader for our current Scholar-in-Residence program, urged us to consider Paul's letter to the Ephesians as a call to "go big" as a church that includes all. She challenged us to think more creatively about what unity and togetherness mean for a church when it is at its best.

*Love God. Love each other. Change the world.*

We are thankful for signs of the church wanting to “go big.” We appreciate the careful deliberations by the Board of Ordained Ministry (BoOM) in its examination of candidates, particularly as the BoOM’s policy states: “We will not consider or evaluate sexual orientation or gender identity nor see them to be sufficient reasons to deny a candidate’s ability to live up to our United Methodist standards.” We are grateful that after choosing not to forward its recommendation of T.C. Morrow for commissioning to the 2017 Clergy Session that it did so this year. Candidates across the conference – straight and LGBTQ alike - continue to answer God’s call to ordained ministry and they need to trust the system they are entering. They need to trust that their dignity will be cared for in the process and that the church sees them as loved by, gifted by, and called by God.

We were heartened that the clergy session refused to accept the surrender of clergy credentials by Foundry’s much-loved and respected former pastor, the Rev. Dr. J. Philip Wogaman, who turned in his credentials to you at last year’s conference because of the failure to move forward Morrow’s candidacy process. We were further encouraged that Annual Conference members approved resolutions brought by the Baltimore-Washington Area Reconciling United Methodists (BWARM) declaring to the special 2019 General Conference that our conference supports removal of the discriminatory language from *The Book of Discipline* and the inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life of the church.

Bishop, in light of all these hopeful signs, your ruling of law during last month’s Annual Conference related to T.C. Morrow and Joey Heath-Mason shocked and saddened us. For some of us it reopened wounds of rejection and trauma; for others, it added to the already overwhelming burden of discouragement and grief over the state of our denomination and world. Who will bear the healing balm to make the wounded whole?

Many of us at Foundry feel disappointed, confused, and even abandoned as a result of the ruling. We will continue to push for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the church. At our baptisms, we made a promise to “resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” Our resistance to the discriminatory practices of our denomination is part of how we fulfill that promise. We will resist the denial of full marriage rites for LGBTQ couples in our churches. We will push forward to ensure that LGBTQ persons who are called and gifted for ordained ministry are given that chance by our church. If necessary, we will engage in acts of biblical obedience or support and defend others who do, to advance the cause for justice.

But now is the time when prophetic leadership is needed from bishops like you. The church cries out for guidance. If you believe the discriminatory language in *The Book of Discipline* is wrong, the church needs not only to hear that, but to see you act on that belief. Waiting to see what happens in February harms the church and harms LGBTQ United Methodists. The “line” that is being drawn in this debate is not between two equivalent camps in a theological debate. The only “line” that is being drawn is one that keeps LGBTQ people out of our church. When that line is drawn, and leaders refuse to erase it—or even to cross it—it damages LGBTQ people, Methodist or non-Methodist. It casts doubt on the message that everyone is welcome in the church universal, and it denies the truth that all people – ALL people – are of sacred worth.

We need bishops who will boldly reject capitulation to bad church laws and instead start declaring—in word and deed—that discrimination against LGBTQ people is incompatible with Christian teaching.

We understand that we do not see eye-to-eye on these issues, but we are encouraged that we do share much common ground. That is why, in the weeks before we share worship together, we invite you into a circle of grace and discernment at Foundry to discuss the many challenges facing our church, country and world. We hope that a time of frank discussion and fellowship will ease hurt feelings, discern a way forward and strengthen the beloved community that God invites us to share.

We pray that we can achieve great things together, through the power and love of Jesus Christ.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Foundry United Methodist Church