

## We Stand for Justice, Love, and Salt | BY NATALIE MONKOU

### The church is called to demonstrate love.

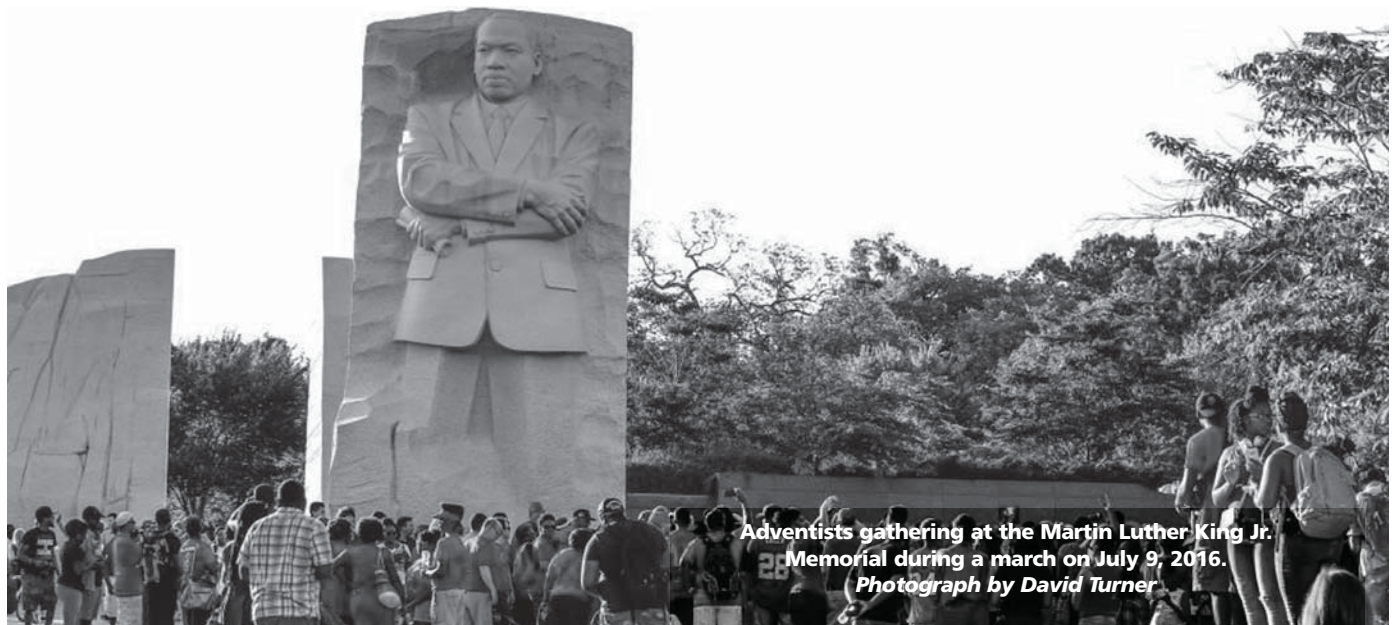
That one sentence resonated with me during the “We Stand for All” rally on a recent weekend. While wearing red, on the afternoon of July 9, 2016, hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists walked from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial to show their care, concern, and support for change in our nation following the deaths of two black men and five police officers. The rally, organized by leaders in the North American Division, including Dan Jackson and G. Alexander Bryant, brought together local conference leaders in the Columbia Union, local pastors, members, and even witnesses that happened to be standing nearby.

At the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, attendees prayed together, sang black hymns and anthems, and listened to church leaders and pastors as they spoke out

against the acts of violence and encouraged the audience to take action in their respective communities through acts of service, organizing workshops with local law enforcement, and getting involved with voter registration drives and education.

I was proud to identify myself as an Adventist that day. The week before had been traumatic, heavy, and filled with the burden of helplessness. When the rally was first announced, it was an easy decision to participate because my silent prayers alone would not be enough. They would have been the equivalent of a quick pat on the back to the family members of the men we lost last week.

This past year has been relentless in continuously showing us another cruel consequence of sin and the human condition in the absence of God’s love. Christianity’s relevance in the world we live in today is tested each time tragedy strikes in communities with a church building and the presence of its members is rendered absent.



Adventists gathering at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial during a march on July 9, 2016. (Photograph by David Turner)

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The rally was just a start. And it should be recognized as a great one.

I stood with people that I knew but also individuals that I did not know. I stood with people who share the color of my skin and individuals who do not. And we stood together, bonded by our desire to verbally acknowledge that we had witnessed revolting and horrific scenes of injustice in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Texas.

Acknowledgment is the first step in healing. Visibly standing together as representatives of Christ is a step in healing.

**The church is called to demonstrate love.**

As a collective body of people—tied through our faith—Adventists should desire to play a role in standing up for the rights of those who have lost them, and actively demonstrate love.

Love and obedience to God go hand in hand and, without both, we cannot influence change in the world. We cannot be a light.

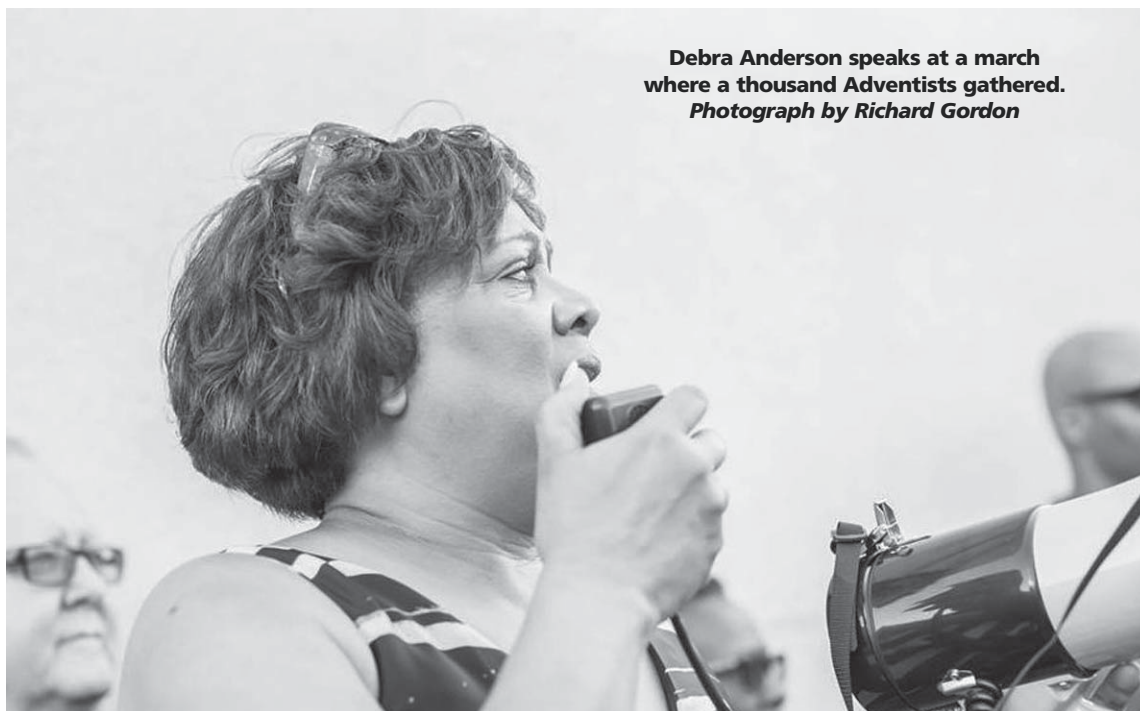
In Matthew 5, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he sets the expectations for His followers by using salt as a metaphor to demonstrate the

importance of influence in the Christian experience. Jesus says,

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

*(Matthew 5:13–16, KJV)*

Jesus' use of "salt" shows how much he understood how to connect with men and women, no matter their age or color. All believers, regardless of gender and economic status, are called to provide light to the world through their influence. What is the purpose of the church if we hide when tough issues arise? And if we delay, what messages will stand in the gap? At a time when the world is watching tragedy unfold in every area of life, indifference and lukewarm rhetoric does not show the world that we are confident in who God is.



**Debra Anderson speaks at a march where a thousand Adventists gathered. Photograph by Richard Gordon**



David Franklin pastors the Allegheny East Conference's Miracle City Church in a Baltimore neighborhood less than six miles from the spot where Freddie Gray died in police custody last April. Photograph by David Turner

To be effective, we have to leave the church building more often, meet and develop genuine relationships with people we do not know, and address the issues that affect them on a daily basis. To be effective, we cannot be complacent in perfect church attendance or use our faith in name only. Using our influence to create change also means that we have the responsibility to filter our actions and our responses through the lens of restoration and healing.

Even Ellen White underscores the importance of being effective Christians through action and just proclaiming our belief in God. In *Desire of Ages* she states that "our profession of faith may proclaim the theory of religion but it is our practical piety that holds forth the word of truth. The consistent life, the holy conversation, the unswerving integrity, the active, benevolent spirit, the godly example—these are the mediums through which light is conveyed to the world" (Chapter 30).

Last weekend, I witnessed the hurt not just from the people who were outside of my church, but those who were also within. The rally gave them (and me) an opportunity to

witness love from a collective body of people that was willing to make an effort to tackle big issues rooted in bias, fear, and discrimination.

The rally showed how Christians can influence the conversation, not just from within the General Conference, but to show the world that the kingdom of God is a place where love, faith, light, justice, hope, and peace are part of the foundation.

**The church is called to demonstrate love.**

We are reminded in Micah 6:8 to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly, and we know that we are called to be salt to the world.

So let us do just that. ■

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