

## GEORGE TILLER KILLED

### 400 attend Old Town vigil for Tiller

#### Speakers cite doctor's strength and compassion

BY STEPHANIE BARNARD

The Wichita Eagle

They came holding signs — “Catholics for Choice,” “George Tiller: American Hero.” They came wearing shirts: National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood, Team Tiller.

They sang songs: “We Shall Overcome,” “Kumbaya,” “Amazing Grace.”

About 400 people gathered in Old Town Square on Sunday night to honor George Tiller, who was shot and killed at his church that morning.

“We’re here peacefully because of the tragedy that happened to Wichita today,” said vigil organizer Dustin Deckard. “He was a member of his community, a member of his church, and he was murdered.”

One by one, people who knew Tiller spoke to the crowd.

“I love him like a brother,” said Peggy Bowman, director of a local fund for women in need of reproductive health care. “He was a fabulous human being who cared about his patients.”

Many spoke of his strength in the face of adversity. Tiller’s clinic had been bombed, and someone had tried to kill him before. But he would not give up, speakers said.

“He wasn’t afraid,” said Willow Eby, a clinic escort. “We won’t be afraid.”

Jim Stanford, a medical student, met Tiller during the “Summer of Mercy” protests in 1991.

“I saw the pain on his face from trying to keep the peace while dealing with his patients. It was a major burden,” Stanford said tearfully.

“Dr. Tiller touched lives. I know he touched mine,” said Rabbi Michael Davis, who counseled patients at the clinic.

“I have friends who demonstrated at Dr. Tiller’s clinic. I have friends who went to Dr. Tiller’s clinic to terminate a pregnancy,” said Connie Pace Adair, a local pastor. “And 30 years ago, I went to his clinic because I was abused. Dr. Tiller helped me. Thank God.”

Jessica Dunne-Olson said she was pregnant with her second child when she worked as a counselor at Tiller’s clinic in 1999.

“I got yelled at (by protesters) every day I walked in there,” she said.

During the holiday season, Tiller gave Dunne-Olson money and sent her to a toy store to buy presents for employees’ children, including her unborn daughter. “He loved children,” she said. Some who spoke said they didn’t always agree with Tiller’s practice but respected him as a person. Others worried about the void Tiller’s death would leave in the availability of abortion services in Kansas, as well as late-term abortion services nationwide. Stormy Johnston said she once saw an out-of-state couple on a city bus who came to terminate a pregnancy that threatened the mother’s life. “Without Dr. Tiller, she would have died,” Johnston said. “One life does not substitute for another.” Dunne-Olson said she’s not sure what will happen to Tiller’s clinic. “There’s nobody that wants to go into this field because of situations like this,” Dunne-Olson said. “He was really dedicated to helping women.”





Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle

At Sunday evening's vigil in Old Town Square, many people who knew Tiller spoke of his strength in the face of adversity. "He wasn't afraid," said Willow Eby, an escort at Tiller's clinic. "We won't be afraid."



Travis Haying/The Wichita Eagle

Peggy Bowman, left, and Peggy Austin-Fresh mourn at Sunday's vigil. "I loved him like a brother," said Bowman, director of a local reproductive health care fund.

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