



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Dear Members and Friends of the Desert Southwest Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name and spirit of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ!

The Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church has issued its decision on the request by the South Central Jurisdiction for a ruling on the legality of the election of Bishop Karen Oliveto. Their ruling is complex because it involves responses to several questions the Judicial Council was asked to consider. There is much that we still need to scrutinize before we can fully understand the ruling and its implications. However, some things we can say about the ruling are outlined in a message from the College of Bishops through our spokesperson, Bishop Elaine Stanovsky. I want to highlight and celebrate one of the statements in Bishop Stanovsky's message: Bishop Karen Oliveto remains a bishop of The United Methodist Church, assigned to lead the Mountain Sky Area. (To read the whole statement, see <http://westernjurisdictionumc.org/a-statement-from-the-western-jurisdiction-college-of-bishops/>)

I encourage us to remember that at the center of this contentious debate is a person who has been called by God to proclaim God's love to all persons in the name of Jesus Christ. Bishop Oliveto graciously gives unselfishly of herself as a pastor and as a colleague bishop and I give thanks for her courageous faith and her strong caring leadership.

Although the Judicial Council's ruling does not immediately nullify Bishop Oliveto's episcopacy, it does in other statements make it clear that our Church does not yet support full inclusion of LGBTQI persons. Because we are not all of one mind, I call us all to pause for moments of reflection and prayer, breathing deeply to take in God's spirit. Just as the breath of air gives life and strength to the body; let God's spirit give us spiritual strength and reassurance that God loves you. For those who have been marginalized and hurt repeatedly by The United Methodist Church, especially LGBTQI persons, I repeat: God loves you. Even when you feel that your Church doesn't love you, God loves you.

I am praying that we will find the courage to live together following the words of Jesus: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also 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)."

I long for the day when the entire United Methodist Church will understand that we are called to love all persons. I will never stop leading our Conference in proclaiming that love. God's love given abundantly and freely to all persons is a model for us to emulate in our lives, in our congregations, and in our communities. I continue to hope and pray that we will live and work together honoring the richness of

God's diversity so that even if we do not think alike, we will love each other. Let us be inspired by John Wesley, who asked: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may." This is my prayer for all United Methodists in the Desert Southwest Conference.

A more detailed response is coming after the bishops of the Western Jurisdiction have had an opportunity to meet and discern a path forward. As I said, this ruling is a multi-faceted pronouncement by the Judicial Council and your bishops will be in prayerful dialogue about it this week. I ask you to be in prayer for us as we meet. Be assured that I am holding you - our laity, clergy, and our ministries - in prayer.

In Christ's love,



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