



Council of Bishops
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



April 28, 2017

TO: All United Methodists

FROM: Bishop Bruce R. Ough,
President Council of Bishops

RE: Judicial Council Decision

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, the Judicial Council released its decision on a request for a declaratory decision from the South Central Jurisdiction (SCJ) in response to the Western Jurisdiction's (WJ) nomination, election, consecration and assignment of Karen Oliveto as a Bishop of the United Methodist Church.

In its decision, the Judicial Council ruled that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law but also said Bishop Oliveto "remains in good standing," until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

This decision means Bishop Oliveto will continue as a Bishop of the church until such process is completed.

The Council of Bishops expresses our appreciation for the Judicial Council's careful and deliberate consideration of this matter and for the thoughtful and considerate participation of all parties to the case. The Judicial Council has a distinct and critical role in the governance structure of the denomination. We recognize and respect the Judicial Council as the body responsible for deciding complex questions of church law, including the right to declare jurisdiction. We implore all within the United Methodist structure and family to honor the Judicial Council ruling.

Yet, we acknowledge that the decision does not help to ease the disagreements, impatience and anxiety that permeates The United Methodist Church over the matter of human sexuality, and particularly this case. Our compassion and prayers of intercession extend to all those who are hurt, relieved, confused or fearful.

The decision does not change the *Book of Discipline*. The Judicial Council's actions are specific to the cases that they are requested or required to consider. Only the General Conference speaks for the church and has the authority to change the *Book of Discipline*. The Council of Bishops will continue to exercise temporal and spiritual oversight support of the church's mission.

The Council of Bishops remains committed to the unity of the church and the flourishing of its mission. We are confident of the work that the Commission on a Way Forward has begun and we believe the Holy Spirit is working through the Commission and Council to accomplish God's purposes

I am encouraged by the relationships that are developing within the Commission. The

distinct and diverse opinions among its members reflect the richness and vitality of The United Methodist Church. The Commission is committed to its task. I believe that their work will bear fruit as we meet for a Special Session of the General Conference in February 2019.

We continue to urge the entire church to stay focused on the Commission's work as our best opportunity to determine God's leading for a way forward. We believe the God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6). We are strongest when we remain in connection with each other.

We urge you to join your bishops in daily prayers for all United Methodists and for the denomination as we tenderly hold the unity and mission of the church in our hearts and hands.

Just as Jesus' disciples were patient in waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Christ into heaven, we too are being called to wait for the revealing of what God has in store for our church. In this Easter Season, let us hear one another, let us understand one another, let us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Where do we go from here? We put our trust in God to strengthen us even as we hold differing views about human sexuality. We must continue to love one another just as Christ instructed us to do. It is by loving one another fully that the world will know we are Christians (John 13:34-35). It is through this incarnational love that we go forth to make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world.

Nearly every day, I hear an inspiring new story of how the people of The United Methodist Church are at work in the world transforming and enriching people's lives. This is what we're about. This is our calling. This is the work we do together, no matter our differences. May we continue to do so for the greater glory of God.

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