



Council of Bishops
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



April 18, 2017

TO: United Methodists

Dear Colleagues in Christ:

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

In a few days, the Judicial Council will act on a request for a declaratory decision from one of our U.S. jurisdictions (South Central) in response to another jurisdiction's (Western) election of Karen Oliveto as a Bishop of The United Methodist Church. As you well know, there is great interest, disagreement and anxiety about the anticipated decision of the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church.

I am in daily prayer for all United Methodists as we are being called upon in this critical moment to tenderly hold the unity and mission of the church in our hearts and hands. I am praying that God will work in and through each of us in our respective contexts to project a non-anxious presence, to point to a future beyond this immediate decision, and to honor the various manifestations of the Spirit reflected in our far-flung Connection.

We have just celebrated Jesus' resurrection and victory over sin and death. We are entering the Easter Season. This is the season of waiting for the Holy Spirit to come among us and make it possible for us to hear one another, to understand one another, to know the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). The watchword for this Easter season comes directly from Jesus: "Do not be afraid."

As the Judicial Council meeting approaches, allow me to share the following points to help you in your conversations around this issue. I offer them to you aware it is not an exhaustive list and that many of you are already fully engaged in these conversations.

- There are several authorized bodies in The United Methodist Church that express the will of our denomination. The General Conference speaks for the church. The Council of Bishops exercises oversight and support of the church's mission. The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality and legality of actions taken by individuals or constituted entities of the church, in this instance, the action taken by a jurisdictional conference. At times these bodies collaborate, and at other times this work is done independently. The Judicial Council will express its own perspective and give its own rationale for its decision.

- The Judicial Council’s actions are always specific to particular circumstances. Because their decision will be about a specific request from one jurisdiction regarding the action of another jurisdiction, their decision will not change The United Methodist Book of Discipline.

- The Council of Bishops is committed to the unity of the church and the flourishing of its mission. One of the instruments of this unity is the Commission on a Way Forward, which is accountable to the Council of Bishops, and through the Council, to the General Conference. We believe the Holy Spirit is operating through the Commission’s and Council’s leadership and conferencing. The conciliar work of the Commission happens concurrently with other legal, legislative, and supervisory processes. However, we urge the entire church to stay focused on the Commission’s work as our best opportunity to determine God’s leading for the church. We believe the God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6) and we need to hold this course.

- Many people have asked me, “What can I do to support you, bishop, and the Commission?” My answer has always been to pray - pray unceasingly, intentionally and earnestly. But, I quickly add, “Pray that God will empty you of all your pre-conceived solutions and preferences so that the Holy Spirit can rush in and fill you with new possibilities, new hope, new life.” God has honored such prayers in the past because self-emptying prayers create room for the Spirit to instruct and guide. I believe God can and will do it again!

I also want to inform you that the Council will release a statement to the Church as soon as possible after we receive the Judicial Council’s decision in this matter.

We are Easter People and we are not afraid! Come Holy Spirit! Come and grant us ears to hear and hearts to discern your wisdom and will for “such a time as this.”

The Peace of the Lord,



Bruce R. Ough, President
Council of Bishops