

**A Message to The United Methodist Church
From The
Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops**

May 4, 2017

As the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, we offer our thoughts related to the recent Judicial Council decision that affects our colleague, Bishop Karen Oliveto, and our entire United Methodist Connection.

We celebrate the good news that Bishop Oliveto is continuing to lead the Mountain Sky Area of The United Methodist Church. While Judicial Council Decision 1341 left her election in place, there is additional work that must be done.

These issues will be properly handled within the Western Jurisdiction according to the processes defined by the *Book of Discipline*.

We, the Bishops of the Western Jurisdiction, speak from the reality of our social location.

Our area is a place of great diversity of races, cultures, languages, ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities. God inspires our hearts to create a home for all God's people, gathered around a table of reconciliation and transformation.

We dream of a United Methodist Church that is multicultural and inclusive, engaged in the life of its communities, with confident, effective lay and clergy leadership who, in diverse ministry settings, form disciples who live out the Good News of Jesus as global citizens.

For many years, the Western part of the United States has been a refuge for LGBTQ persons from across the US and around the world. Our region is a place where they can live fully into who God has created them to be, free from discrimination, violence, and closets.

We hear their stories, of their own witness.

Despite being hurt and excluded by the institutional church many have returned to faith in Jesus Christ in United Methodist churches in the West. In many cases, the families who love them and the friends who walk with them have also come to be part of United Methodist congregations.

This reminds us of Paul's words as he spoke to the church at Ephesus:

“So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

Ephesians 2:19-20

We the people called United Methodist in the Western Jurisdiction witness daily the gifts and reflections of God's grace in LGBTQ persons who faithfully serve among us as lay leaders, pastors, district superintendents, and now, as a bishop.

Our experience informs how we do ministry together, how Boards of Ordained Ministry approach their work, and how we carry out our episcopal duties.

Our life together in Jesus Christ has been enriched by the fullness of their presence and participation. We recognize that we in the church have differing views of what full inclusion means. Even in the West we are not of one mind. Nevertheless, we believe Christ calls us to live and serve together as one even in our differences.

Our Christian experience teaches us that God's love is wide enough for all of us.

It is not always easy for us to hold relationship with those whose understandings differ from us, but John Wesley encourages us to remember: "We don't have to think alike to love alike."

There is much work to be done before we the church are able to love as Jesus has loved us.

We in the Western Jurisdiction will continue to be a home for all God's beloved as we strive to be faithful disciples of Jesus the Christ.

We shall continue to pray for the work of the Commission on a Way Forward, as they lead us into a new vision for our life together as The United Methodist Church. Our church.

May God bless you.

The Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops

Active Bishops

Grant J. Hagiya, President
Robert T. Hoshibata
Karen Oliveto

Elaine J.W. Stanovsky
Minerva G. Carcaño

Retired Bishops

Roy Sano
Elias Galvan
Beverly Shamana

Melvin Talbert
Mary Ann Swenson
Warner Brown

(Present at April 30-May 4, 2017 Council of Bishops meeting)