



**The United Methodist Church
Ohio East Area**

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**Tracy S. Malone
Resident Bishop**

**Gary George
Assistant to the Bishop**

April 29, 2017

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

I write this letter first and foremost to call upon all East Ohio clergy and churches to pray unceasingly as we, The United Methodist Church, commit ourselves to faithfully live out our mission, unity and connection while we continue to struggle together with the seemingly uncrossable impasse related to human sexuality. I remind us that, “we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”

As a bishop of The United Methodist Church, I am committed to the unity of the Church and the flourishing of its mission. One of the instruments of this unity is the Council of Bishops’ [Commission on a Way Forward](#). I trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the leadership and the conferencing of both the Commission and the Council. The Commission on a Way Forward is accountable to the Council of Bishops and, through the Council, to the General Conference.

The Council of Bishops has called a special session of the General Conference for February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of this session shall be limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Council of Bishops, based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward.

I also write to inform you that on Friday, April 28 the Judicial Council, the Church’s highest court, ruled on the South Central Jurisdiction’s request for a declaratory decision, in response to the 2016 election and consecration of Bishop Karen Oliveto by the Western Jurisdictional Conference. The Judicial Council ruled that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law, but it also stated that 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 a process is completed. This ruling does not affect the work of the Commission on a Way Forward because the Commission works concurrently with other legal, legislative, and supervisory processes.

As we receive the Judicial Council's ruling, we recognize that there are no winners. I am reminded of these words from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be ... "

We are the beloved community of Christ. When one part of the body hurts and suffers, we all hurt and suffer. Therefore, let us pray for Bishop Karen Oliveto, her spouse Robin, the Mountain Sky Area, the Judicial Council, the Commission on a Way Forward, and the entire United Methodist Church.

While we wait in hope and in great anticipation of the Holy Spirit guiding us and leading us forward, I offer this prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Finally, let us stay encouraged and stay focused on the mission of Christ and his Church. Let us remember to keep the main thing the main thing. We are to: make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; love the Lord with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength and love our neighbors as ourselves; and act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy S. Malone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tracy S. Malone
Resident Bishop