



The United Methodist Church
Virginia Conference
Sharma D. Lewis
Resident Bishop

P. O. Box 5606
Glen Allen, VA 23058

April 29, 2017

Dear Virginia Annual Conference,

I write this letter to inform you that last night, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church ruled that the consecration of Bishop Karen Oliveto, who leads the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conference, must be reviewed in order to determine if it is in violation of church law. The ruling does not remove Bishop Oliveto from the Episcopal office but provides for further administrative or judicial process by the jurisdictional or central conference or the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops.

We must remember that only the General Conference speaks for the denomination. The Council of Bishops exercises oversight and supports the church's mission. The particular role of the Judicial Council is to determine the constitutionality and legality of actions taken by individuals or constituted entities of the church. The Judicial Council's actions are always specific to particular circumstances and this decision will not change *The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*.

As the Resident Bishop of the Virginia Conference, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Judicial Council, understanding that its decision has come after prayerful deliberation and with intense interest from many concerned parties, all of whom have hopes for our denomination. Unfortunately, in this decision there are no "winners." I acknowledge there will be great pain and disappointment on either side of this outcome.

I know many of you are wondering – how does this decision affect the Commission On the Way Forward? In short, the work of the Commission will continue.

The Commission On the Way Forward was proposed by the Council of Bishops and approved by the 2016 General Conference to do a complete examination and to propose possible revisions of every paragraph of *The Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality. The Commission was also charged to explore options to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.

My prayer remains that we trust that God is leading our denomination to that unity and that we continue as an annual conference to keep the mission of The United Methodist Church before our congregations. Today, as yesterday, we are called "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

In closing, I ask that you join me in continuing to pray for Bishop Karen Oliveto and her family, the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conference, the Western Jurisdiction, the Judicial Council, the Commission On the Way Forward and The United Methodist Church.

If you would like to read the ruling in its entirety, [click here](#).

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis