

Appeared on [Karen Oliveto's Facebook Page](#)

3/22/2019 at 2:22 PM ·

A Statement from Your Mountain Sky Conference Cabinet

We in the Mountain Sky Conference have a heritage of bold ministry, with a willingness to break barriers and build bridges:

Brother William Wesley Van Orsdel literally dug up new ground to minister to the needs of those often overlooked.

Women ably served in pastoral ministry in remote areas long before women received full ordination rights.

In 1982, Bishop Melvin Wheatley ordained the first openly LGBTQ person. When challenged he replied, "I am in the business of appointing sons and daughters of God presented by name to me by the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, not by label."

So it is fitting that our recent shared ministry has been blessed by the leadership of Bishop Karen Oliveto, the first openly lesbian bishop in the United Methodist connection.

As heirs of such a rich legacy, we reject the Traditional Plan passed at General Conference 2019 as decisively un-Methodist in both letter and spirit. There are no second-class citizens among those created as beloved children in the image of God – not in God's kin'dom, not in the congregations of the United Methodist Church, and not in the communities in which United Methodists are called to serve.

We acknowledge and bewail the harm done in God's name over many years to so many who have always been welcome at God's table, but who have been so often excluded by society and the church. To our LGBTQ siblings – as well as to our siblings of every color, ability, class, theology, or region, and each and every beloved child of God who may find yourself in any way atypical and pushed to the margins: we are heartily sorry for these our misdoings and pledge to keep the table open. To our LGBTQ siblings – clergy and laity – in particular: you have long been pawns and punching bags in the middle of a shameful, if heartfelt, dispute and we are no longer willing to allow you to bear this burden alone. We see you. We stand with you.

To our siblings who lament actions and decisions seeming to fly in the face of explicit United Methodist policy and church law: we humbly offer that standing against unjust, demeaning, and hypocritical laws is a practice learned first from Jesus with, to name a few, the lame man at Bethsaida (John 5), the stooped woman in the synagogue (Luke 13), and his disciples' failure to maintain ritual hygiene (Matthew 15).

More recently, we learned from the saints of the civil rights movement on buses, bridges, and at lunch counters what biblical obedience looks like in a modern context. Actions in this tradition are far from capitulation to secular culture. Rather, we recognize them as means by which God works to critique and deconstruct the unholy witness of a church striving for perfection in love.

We reject denominational adherence to narrowly circumscribed litmus tests, such as literal and limited readings of English translations of Scripture, as inadequate and contrary to holistic theological reflection as outlined by the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. At the same time, we do not reject those who hold these views, preferring instead to live in a healthy, dynamic, and catholic (universal) tension with all who earnestly and joyfully seek to embody and grow in the love of Christ. What we envision is not a progressive or traditionalist church, but a church home for all God's people where all seek to learn from each other in partnership with the Holy Spirit. This church home is steeped in the acceptance and expression of God's overflowing grace – prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying – as evidenced in creation, cross, and the beloved community of God's kin'dom.

In anticipation of God doing a new thing among us in the coming months and years, the appointive cabinet of the Mountain Sky Conference will continue to live into the vision of the One Church Plan – which was endorsed by clear majorities of the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward, and United States delegates to General Conference 2019. Pastors and congregations in the Mountain Sky Conference will continue to be actively and categorically supported in serving their communities as their conscience requires. Appointment making will continue to take into account the diversity of individual clergy and cultural contexts across the vast geography – physical, spiritual, and theological – of the Mountain Sky Conference.

Finally, we implore all who have called the United Methodist Church home to call forth an image that for you exemplifies our United Methodist family at its best. Rest in that image for a moment. Is it an infant, bald head still dripping, held aloft as she was introduced to her church family for the first time as a baptized child of God? Is it the weary smiles all around as the last tools were packed up at the end of a mission project? Is it the tender shared vigil as a loved one made their last journey home? Is it the church family's voices raised heavenward as candles pierced the Christmas Eve night? These are moments that recall our best selves, our best church, and sustain us when even cherished familial relationships are strained to breaking.

We in the Mountain Sky Conference are striving to live in God's grace and abundance as we lead a re-energized, peaceful, and compassionate movement to claim the life-changing love of Jesus Christ for ALL people. There will always be an open chair at the table for you as we sing together:

Be present at our table, Lord;

be here and everywhere adored;

thy creatures bless, and grant that we

may feast in paradise with thee.

May it be so.

Bishop Karen P. Oliveto

Rev. Jeff Rainwater, Dean of the Cabinet, Wyoming District Superintendent

Rev. Jan Witman, Montana West District Superintendent

Rev. Margaret Gillikin, Trinity District Superintendent

Rev. Paul Kottke, Mile High Metro District Superintendent

Rev. Tezenlo Thong, Peaks/Pikes Peak District Superintendent

Rev. Marv Vose, Utah/Western Colorado District Superintendent

Rev. Deborah Christine, Montana East District Superintendent

Rev. Amy Gearhart, Senior Executive for Transition and Conference Culture

Rev. Youngsook Kang, Director of Connectional Ministries/Superintendent for Leadership Development