

Dear Church,

I am sure you have heard, at the very least, minimal information about the current status of the United Methodist Church.

I gathered information regarding the United Methodist Church, the Special Called General Conference back in February, and the events and conversations that have happened since.

I am asking you to take in a lot of information. I do not expect you to be experts on the political movements of the United Methodist Church. I simply want you to have access to all denomination's decisions in the last few months as this will be a central conversation at Annual Conference this year and leading into this time in 2020.

In February, there was a Special Called General Conference to discuss and vote on the UMC's stance on LGBTQIA+ in regards to ordination and marriage. After General Conference in 2016, a team of clergy and lay people from across the denomination was put together to offer a "Way Forward".

The Way Forward Team offered three plans that were up for vote in February:

- "Traditional Plan" holding the values that "Homosexuality is not compatible with Christian Teaching" (From the Book of Discipline).
- The One Church Plan, offered Annual Conferences, Churches, and Pastors to choose their stance on issues of Sexuality.
- The final plan offered was the Connectional Church plan, which would have split the United States Methodist into three connectional conferences. ([Here is a detailed article about the Special General Conference](#))

In February, the General Conference passed the Traditional Plan by 53%. With this vote also came several amendments strengthening not only the current stance of the UMC, but offered sever and immediate punishment for those who did not uphold the Book of Discipline in regards to Human Sexuality.

Along with the Traditional Plan, the General Conference passed a plan of dissolution, offering a way out for those who could not comply with the vote. This was intended to be a way out for the [Wesleyan Covenant Association](#). This plan was passed before any of the Way Forward plans were voted on.

All of the decisions voted on at General Conference have to be approved by the Judicial Council which makes sure the constitutionality of the voted items.

In April, much of the passed Traditional Plan was ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council. The items which did pass included:

- a stronger stance on exclusion of LGBTQIA+ people for ordination;
- and stronger penalties for Pastors who preside at same sex marriages, as well as a more complicated complaint process for these matters.

[Attached here](#) (Traditional Plan Ruling) and [here](#) (Disaffiliation Ruling) is a detailed look at what passed the Judicial Council and will go into effect January 1, 2020.

Currently, there is a considerable amount of anxiety with our conference as well as the global denomination. There is a clear divide in the United Methodist Church. Since the vote in February, many conferences and jurisdictions across the world have made statements of non-compliance or resistance to the Traditional Plan. The Western Jurisdiction, the area in which our conference resides, posted the following statement in response to General Conference which can be found [here](#).

In response to the General Conference Vote and Judicial ruling, the Mountain Sky Conference has committed to living into the diverse ministry context of Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and one church in Idaho. The Mountain Sky Conference, formerly the Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain Conferences, has been living into the beliefs of the One Church Plan since 1982. You can find more detailed information regarding Post General Conference [here](#).

Across the Denomination there are groups meeting who are attempting to find a way forward for the United Methodist Church. [UM-Forward](#) and [UMC Next](#) are groups of United Methodists who have met in the last three weeks and have produced statements about what they hope for the future of the UMC.

Attached is a message from Bishop Karen written on May 4, 2019, expressing the hopes and anxiety of the conference and an article from [NBC News](#) which captures a media perspective on these matters of the United Methodist Church.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions leading into Sunday or beyond.

“Do all the good...”
Pastor Zach

**Bishop Karen's weekly message to the Mountain Sky Conference:
May 4, 2019**

Praying for the clergy and laity of the Mountain Sky Conference as we prepare ourselves to come together for Sunday.

This is a time of tremendous anxiety in our denomination. The fallout from General Conference and the Judicial Council decision continues to roil through The United Methodist Church like seismic aftershocks, each one creating more damage and trauma. Many of our colleges, universities and seminaries are considering disaffiliating with the UMC, unable to live into the discrimination that has been even more deeply codified in our Book of Discipline. Young people are rejecting confirmation, being unwilling to take vows of commitment to the UMC. What has happened to us? What does the future hold for us?

Pastors worry about their future: how will they be able to live out their call to ministry if the church splits? How can they live with integrity if the church doesn't? Lay and clergy LGBTQ persons feel waves of trauma as the church they love and committed themselves to has rejected them, again and again and again. Lay people decry the ways GC has further alienated their lgbtq loved ones as well as their children and grandchildren—they worry if their churches will have a future if succeeding generations want no part of it. It seems as if the future of the UMC rests in rigid uniformity and punitive practice, far from the wide expressions of faithfulness that spring out of experiences of God's generous grace.

Anxiety brings with it suspicion: we wind up projecting our anxiety on anyone doing anything to consider ways to navigate the future. We are torn by paralysis and an aching compulsion to do SOMETHING.

We aren't the only ones who hold such feelings. Following the resurrection, fear, anxiety and suspicion were in no short supply amongst the disciples following the death of Jesus. They denied knowing him, hid behind closed doors, and refused to believe in the risen Christ even when he was staring them in the face. Time and time again, they were stunned when they encountered the reality of the resurrection.

I believe we are in a similar moment. Perhaps God is doing a new thing, right in our very midst. Do you perceive it?

Prior to General Conference, we in the Mountain Sky Conference (MSC) called together a task force to help our conference prepare for the aftermath of the GC. We thought that either the One Church Plan or the status quo would be the outcome of the February meeting. We were clear we wanted to have plans in place to help conservative pastors and churches know that even if they were a minority voice in the MSC and in the denomination, they would still be valued and have an important place in the expression of Methodism in our conference if they chose to stay. We were not prepared for the adoption of the Traditionalist Plan, which now puts the majority of our MSC churches at odds with the decision made by the GC delegates.

That one task force has turned into seven (Core, Triage, Safe Harbor, New Places for New People, Communications, Fundraising, and Legal) as we look at ways we can maintain the values of the MSC and continue to build strong and vital congregations as we move into the future together. We will be sharing more about these groups and their work, as well as ways you can get involved.

Additionally, we are working with leadership of the Western Jurisdiction. The Western Jurisdiction has long been committed to a church that reflects the diversity found in God's beloved children and is continuing to explore how we continue to do so in this new era of Methodism. As well, last month Rev. Kent Ingram and I were invited to attend a meeting in Atlanta hosted by Rev. Adam Hamilton. Following that meeting, we were invited to submit nominations to have 10 people from each legacy conference attend an upcoming meeting of 600 United Methodists in Kansas City. Thirty lay and clergy names were submitted. Additional names were self-nominated or nominated by others. From that list, Rev. Hamilton sent out invitations for the meeting. Invitations continue to be sent as space opens up due to responses from folks unable to go. Other members of our conference are attending the UM-Forward meeting in Minneapolis. Still others continue to work with the Wesleyan Covenant Association.

I share these things not to increase anxiety, but to let you know that there are many conversations happening within our annual conference and beyond it. We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds our future.

In these days of anxiety, fear and suspicion, reach out to others. Reach out to your pastor, your conference lay leaders, your district superintendent, your

conference staff, and me. Ask your questions. Share how the Spirit has been speaking to you as you ponder the future of our church. Seek to maintain relationships. Consider what faithful witness looks like these days, both within the church (and even more importantly) beyond it.

Stay alert and on the lookout. Even when death feels as if it has the upper hand, God is at work, in a tomb, in our hearts, in our world, and even in our church. Perhaps resurrection is already revealing itself. May God grant us the eyes to see it.

With love,
Bishop Karen