

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