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April 11, 2023, Centennial, CO—UMARC Requests Bishop Karen Oliveto Serve Twelve Years

United Methodist bishops usually serve four to eight years in a geographical episcopal area before they retire or move to a new region. The United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy (UMARC), however, is hoping that Bishop Karen P. Oliveto will not choose to retire in 2024 and that the Western Jurisdictional Episcopal Committee will re-assign her to the Mountain Sky Area for an additional four years. (The Mountain Sky covers the four states of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana, plus a few churches in Idaho.)

In a resolution passed unanimously by UMARC's Steering Committee, they called on Bishop Oliveto and the Episcopal Committee to ensure her service in the Mountain Sky for twelve years. "Not since the dynamic years of Bishop Melvin Wheatley from 1972 to 1984, have we experienced the extended prophetic and pastoral leadership essential for moving our churches fully into an era of inclusive United Methodism," said co-chairs Rev. Dr. Harvey Martz and Rev. Dr. Donald Messer.

The resolution asserts that "Bishop Oliveto has broken the 'glass ceilings' that prohibited and even crushed previous LGBT+ Christians. She has provided hope and inspiration in our conference and world-wide that God truly loves all people and that the sin of discrimination must be eradicated in our church's polity and programs."

While other conferences have splintered due to disaffiliation, her gracious leadership has resulted in relatively few churches considering leaving United Methodism in her episcopal area. During her tenure, she successfully achieved the long-time dream of uniting the Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain Conferences. In addition, she has carried the extra-burden of serving as President of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops during an exceptionally difficult time in the life of the church.

"Considering the high tension and hard work Bishop Oliveto and her wife Robin Ridenour experience," say Messer and Martz, "we recognize and respect their need for a new life of service in retirement. However, we would be unfaithful to our laity friends and clergy colleagues, and the well-being of our congregations, if we did not request and pray for an extension of a ministry truly blessed by God."

Submitted on behalf of the Steering Committee of the United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy & Friends (UMARC) by Rev. Dr. Donald E. Messer, Chair, Centennial, Colorado. www.umarc.org