

To fall in love with God's vision of justice-making work, and to imagine that vision compelling an institutional church grounded in Wesleyan theology to wrestle and take a stand for inclusion and wholeness, comes with its perils and its genuine joys. These are not journeys for the faint of heart, or for those whose spiritual needs require a leave-taking which is to be honored. To be steadfast on that journey requires, at times, a spirit of commitment, grace abundant, and a willingness to open one's heart and mind to the Spirit of God that is both fully emotional and fully rational. On the journey, one is blessed to find colleagues and friends who pray with you and for you, who put their faith and bodies on the line for the justice-work of God, and who consistently persist to name truths in the face of challenge.



Bishop Karen Oliveto and Deaconess Robin Ridenour exemplify such steadfast commitment, presence, and love. They bring to the world a spirit of passion that is grounded in their unending compassion for the gospel and the people of God. I am often touched by a sermon Bishop Oliveto delivers, a story shared, a question raised, or a wisdom that comes forth in an unexpected moment. She is strategic and smart, knows in her heart and mind the call of the gospel and the claims of the Wesleyan tradition, and embodies the gifts and graces of ministry that bring a renewed vitality to the people of God and to the church. Her work with our students at Brite Divinity School engages leaders in the call of a God who loves beyond knowing. Deaconess Robin embodies the commitments of the ancient tradition of servant leaders, while bringing a genuine sense of humor and wholeness to the world around her. Together, they change lives . . . and are changing the church.

Whether lamenting the disappointments that come in the call for justice, celebrating the gifts of love for the people of God, weeping at the torture of souls and lives not yet welcomed home, or laughing about buffaloes that appear on a road in Montana, I know that God's love for them is without fail . . . and their love for each other is beyond measure . . . and our love for them is abundant with grace.

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