



## Mountain Sky Conference The United Methodist Church

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### **Love Came Down at Christmas: 2018 Christmas letter from Bishop Oliveto**

Dear brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ,

In this Christmas greeting, I want to celebrate with you joy as we celebrate our first Christmas as the Mountain Sky Conference. This year, we have made many changes. Through the midst of all that is changing around us, I have seen how God is moving through each of you and is calling all of us deeper into Beloved Community in exciting, new ways. I want to thank you for your creative, engaging discipleship, and the ways that each of you bring God's message of hope and healing to those in our conference and around the world. It is an honor to serve as your bishop as we continue to respond to the Holy Spirit in our midst.

We continue in the season of Advent as we move to Christmas Day. Advent reminds us that before our time of celebration, we must look inward, see our own need for Christ, and prepare our hearts and our lives once again for his coming. Each week in Advent, we ponder what Jesus has brought into our life. It's easy to want to skip this self-reflection and jump right to the joy of celebrating Christ's coming. Yet, when we do this, we leave little room to acknowledge what is really happening in our lives and communities.

In recent years, more and more churches are taking opportunities during this season to hold gatherings for those who are struggling during this time. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, financial debt, struggling family relationships, or the loss of a job, the brokenness of our lives and world weigh especially heavy this time of year. But here is the beauty of Advent: we are reminded that even in our messy, imperfect world, the love of God shows up when and where we need it most.

In reading the birth narratives in the Gospels, it is important for us to remember that Jesus himself was born in a time of turmoil. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Herod, the ruler over Judea, was so threatened by the idea of God anointing a new leader of the Jewish people, that he bribed the wise men to tell Herod where this new child was born, so that he could get rid of what he assumed was a threat to his political power. It was only through the intervention of God's angel that Joseph, Mary, and the newborn Jesus escaped to a foreign land. It is in this setting that God chooses to be born into the world as Christ. It is in this time of persecution, oppression, and violence that Christ's birth signals a new way to live, a way of love.

The hymn "Love Came Down at Christmas," written by Christina Rossetti, tells us that love, through Christ, came into this world so that we might know God's love more fully. When we understand the circumstances of Jesus' birth, the words of this hymn bear a deeper message. In our brokenness, God's love, through Jesus, comes into our world so that we might experience new life and hope in places we least expect it. The past year has been filled with violence, pain, anger, and confusion. The ever-increasing "us versus them" mentality that we experienced this year signifies – above all else – our continued need for God to enter into our lives with a message of love. Friends, know that love came down at Christmas so that we could come together.



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Love came down at Christmas so that we might find wholeness and healing in broken places in our lives and relationships. Love came down at Christmas so that we would see the “other” as God’s beautiful creation. Love came down so that we might find new ways to face the challenges that arise.

To my kin in Christ, as you read over the words of this hymn below, consider where God’s love has shown itself in your life this year. What was the result? Where has new life and love come out of the brokenness?

*Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, Love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus, but wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine;  
Love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign*

As we wait with anticipation for Christ’s coming, may we be filled with the knowledge that love comes into our lives, not just on Christmas, but at any moment we choose to open ourselves up to God’s abundant grace. May love be our token in this season, and throughout the year to come.

Blessings,

Bishop Karen P. Oliveto