



RELIGION & RACE

General Commission on Religion and Race

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

General Commission on Religion and Race
Board of Directors

April 27, 2023

Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops
Western Jurisdiction Committee on Episcopacy
c/o Rev. Dan Hurlbert, Chair
Western Jurisdiction Committee on Investigation
c/o Rev. Ann Lyter, Chair

Dear members of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, Committee on Episcopacy, and Committee on Investigation,

Grace and peace to you.

The Board of Directors for the General Commission on Religion and Race is deeply troubled by the Western Jurisdiction's ongoing suspension and treatment of Bishop Minerva Carcaño, the first female Latina bishop in the UMC, regarding complaints filed against her. Since her suspension was announced on March 9, 2022¹, Bishop Carcaño has been denied due process and a fair hearing.

We strongly urge you to lift the suspension against Bishop Carcaño immediately, or at the latest, within 30 days, from the date of this letter. Furthermore, since we are well beyond the permitted extensions of the supervisory process which "should be carried out in a confidential manner"² we strongly urge that, within 30 days of the date of this letter, you issue a statement that explains the general nature of the charges, the provisions of the Discipline she is alleged to have violated, and unless they are minors, either the names or relationship of the complainant(s) to Bishop Carcaño.

This unprecedented, ongoing, and indefinite suspension, along with the imposed confidentiality surrounding the nature of the charges is harming Bishop Carcaño and the whole of The United

¹ *An Announcement for the people of the California-Nevada Conference from the Western Jurisdiction Committee on the Episcopacy and the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops*, dated March 9, 2022.

² *Discipline* ¶ 413.3b.

Methodist Church. Identifying the nature of the charges against her would alleviate the damage of ongoing discussion, speculation, and “adjudication in the public sphere” about this case that you say confidentiality was imposed to prevent.³ Likewise, it is difficult to see how your “high value ... placed in moving through the process honoring the dignity of all involved” has been preserved for Bishop Carcaño.⁴

Bishop Carcaño’s fair process rights have been undeniably violated. We call your attention to the significant statements made by some members of the Judicial Council who heard Bishop Carcaño’s appeal. “Fair process is a bedrock principle of the Church that must be present at every stage of a complaint proceeding. In this case, fair process has been violated. The Bishop’s rights have been violated. Therefore, we disagree with the majority opinion and believe that the Bishop is entitled to immediate reinstatement to her episcopal assignment.”⁵

And now, well more than a year later, there are more questions than answers, with no apparent end to the process or the suspension. Under what authority is Bishop Carcaño’s suspension continuing? The administrative suspension has far exceeded not only the Disciplinary limitation of 60 days but also the absolute maximum allowed of 300 days.⁶ What has necessitated such a lengthy suspension?⁷

On October 25, 2022, you announced that the suspension was continuing pursuant to a request of counsel for the church. Since there is no provision in the Book of Discipline that allows for counsel for the church to seek or mandate such a suspension, under what provision was the suspension continued?

Then, on Dec. 22, 2022, the California Nevada Committee on Episcopacy stated that the recommendation for continued suspension came from the Jurisdictional Committee on Investigation and was ordered by the Jurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy. What is the role of the California Nevada Committee on Episcopacy with the complaint process?

When and how did this matter become a judicial process? When did these deliberations occur? When were decisions made? What body or person made the decisions?

According to the Nominations Report of the Western Jurisdiction, the Jurisdictional Committee on Investigations is predominately white.⁸ Since the Committee, if involved, has no Hispanic members yet would be conducting the investigation into the matter against a Bishop of color,

³ Letter to MARCHA, dated March 25, 2022, signed by Bishop Karen Oliveto (President, Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops) and Rev. Mary Huycke (Chair, Western Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee): “Complaints are not meant to be discussed and adjudicated in the public sphere, but in settings conducive to deep conversation that restores all to right relationship.”

⁴ Id.

⁵ Judicial Council Memorandum 1450, dissenting opinion.

⁶ *Discipline* ¶ 413.3a.

⁷ In an administrative complaint process, the Discipline allows for but does not mandate suspension of a Bishop “to protect the well-being of the complainant, the Church and/or bishop,” ¶ 413.31 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (“*Discipline*”).

⁸ Full member demographics include 5 white, 1 Asian, and 1 African American members. The alternates are 4 white and 1 African American. <https://westernjurisdictionmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-Public-WJ-Nominations-Report.pdf>

how will this result in fair process for Bishop Carcaño and how have you ensured that the Committee reflects the “racial, ethnic, and gender diversity”⁹ of the jurisdiction?

If this matter is now a judicial process, the Book of Discipline ¶ 2701.4c allows disclosure of the “nature of the complaint” when there has been “significant disruption to the . . . annual conference, or the context of ministry by the judicial matter.” This matter has and is causing significant disruption to the annual conference and denomination. MARCHA and the Chinese Caucus of California-Nevada have raised serious concerns about the suspension and treatment of Bishop Carcaño. Bishop Carcaño has long been a recognized leader within the denomination.¹⁰ Recently, even the Baptist News Global posted an article titled, “What has happened to suspended UMC Latina Bishop?”¹¹

As is noted above, for proper transparency in this process, we believe it to be crucial that the names or relationship of the complainants to Bishop Carcaño be revealed. The public announcement of the suspension and following updates have named *only* Bishop Carcaño, not the names of the complainants or their relationship to Bishop Carcaño. It is fundamentally unfair to publicly name one party to a complaint but not the other. In other words, there should have been complete confidentiality or no confidentiality.

The purpose of a suspension of a bishop, according to the Book of Discipline, is “to protect the well-being of the complainant, the Church and/or bishop”.¹² What is the nature of the well-being and whose well-being is being protected? In the absence of information about the nature of the suspension, particularly because the suspension involves a bishop of color who has had a history of calling the denomination to account to act on behalf of migrants and the marginalized, the denomination has been denied her voice on matters of immigration and migration, a key area of her leadership.

Because the terms of her suspension, as clarified by the California Nevada Committee on Episcopacy in December 2022, have prevented Bishop Carcaño from “being in contact with persons affiliated with the organization at any level,”¹³ she has also been cut off from colleagues and others within the denomination who would ordinarily provide her with support. What mechanisms are in place for her to receive support beyond the elders she has chosen to accompany her in this process?

Another question is whether the Western Jurisdiction can adjudicate this matter without violating basic conflicts of interest. Bishop Carcaño has been a bishop for 19 years, serving in three episcopal areas. Because the nature of the charges and the relationship of the complainants to Bishop Carcaño are not known, GCORR notes several concerns: did or do any of the members of the supervisory response team have a conflict of interest; are any bishops in the College truly

⁹ *Discipline* ¶ 2703.1.

¹⁰ <https://www.cnumc.org/bishop>

¹¹ <https://baptistnews.com/article/what-has-happened-to-suspended-umc-latina-bishop/>

¹² *Discipline* ¶ 413.3(a)

¹³ [*Conference Committee on Episcopacy summarizes process involving Bishop Carcaño*](#), December 22, 2022, California Nevada Conference of the UMC, Conference Committee on Episcopacy.

free of conflicts of interest or the perception of such conflicts – either in favor or against Bishop Carcaño?

Bishop Carcaño is presumed innocent during the judicial process. Yet, this lengthy, ongoing, and indefinite suspension is difficult to view as anything but punitive. In fact, the requirement that she not be in communication with anyone and her physical separation from her colleagues at Jurisdictional Conference violates her presumption of innocence and is perceived as shunning.

In light of JCD 1484 that affirms para. 413 which requires that if the matter is not resolved within 180 days of the receipt of the complaint by the president or secretary of the College of Bishops and the matter has not been referred as an administrative or judicial complaint, then the matter will move to a panel assembled by the Council of Bishops.¹⁴ This decision also holds that the Council may take up the complaint at any time in the process after 180 days. Therefore, we urge you to immediately lift the suspension of Bishop Carcaño and refer this matter to the Council of Bishops.

The GCORR Board of Directors requests that this matter be expedited, and that Bishop Carcaño be reinstated to her episcopal responsibilities as the process continues. We seek a process with full transparency that does not utilize confidentiality to maintain the church in a cloud of suspicion, and so that we can ensure that the process is just and fair to all, including Bishop Carcaño.

We look forward to your response.

Signed:



Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi
President

Rev. Dr. Stephen Handy
Executive Committee Member

Prof. Framer Mella
Executive Committee Member

Rev. Ben Adams
Executive Committee Member



Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo
General Secretary

Rev. Alka Lyall
Executive Committee Member

Jen Ihlo, Esq.
Executive Committee Member

Rev. Zach Anderson
Executive Committee Member

¹⁴ *Discipline* ¶ 413.3.d.I.2.