



## Monitoring Report of The United Methodist Church Western Jurisdiction Trial of Bishop Minerva Carcaño

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**DECEMBER 8, 2023**

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* mandates the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) to challenge The United Methodist Church (UMC) through monitoring its meetings, gatherings, and processes to assure that all voices are heard, all persons are treated with dignity and respect, and there is fairness in the processes followed by The UMC (§2102). For this reason, GCSRW is uniquely aware of Disciplinary standards and best practices in response to a formal complaint.

In this monitoring report, there are three pieces of the complaint process addressed: the suspension, the Just Resolution, and the trial. GCSRW had limited access to pre-trial matters and sent monitors to observe the trial. This report is the compilation of GCSRW's observations and monitoring during the continuum of the complaint process and trial.

In [March 2022](#), GCSRW learned, through public sources, a formal complaint had been filed against Bishop Minerva Carcaño and she had been suspended from all episcopal duties. At that time, neither the nature of the complaint nor the process followed in reaching the decision to suspend had been announced. GCSRW representatives made an inquiry to determine if all parties had a support person to accompany them during the process. However, GCSRW did not know the identity of the complainants, the nature of the complaints, or the specifications of the charges until they were announced at the beginning of the trial on September 19, 2023.

Shortly after the suspension was announced, GCSRW and the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) received a request from Metodistas Asociados Representando la Causa de los Hispano Americanos (MARCHA) to intervene and actively monitor the complaint process and resulting suspension. While honoring confidentiality of the complainants and respecting the integrity of the process, there was concern that a Hispanic, female bishop was being treated differently than similarly situated male bishops.

In May 2022, GCSRW and GCORR initiated conversations with the leadership of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops to request that GCSRW and GCORR representatives receive information needed to analyze the past proceedings and to monitor the process going forward. GCSRW learned an appeal had been filed to the Judicial Council and proceedings within the Western Jurisdiction had been paused pending the Judicial Council's decision.

In March 2023, on the one-year anniversary of the suspension, the GCSRW [Board of Directors issued a written statement to the Church](#) requesting transparency in the process that would allow GCSRW to comply with its monitoring mandate and offering to help the parties reach a Just Resolution to allow healing to begin for all parties. With the appointment of the trial's presiding officer, GCSRW received a formal invitation to monitor. GCSRW representatives attended and monitored the trial.

## Trial Observations

On September 19, 2023, the trial began. While initially scheduled to be held in the California-Pacific Annual Conference in August 2023, the presiding officer granted a change of venue request which predicated changing the date and venue. The trial was held in the North Central Jurisdiction at the offices of Wespath Benefits and Investments in Glenview, Illinois. United Methodist Communications (UMCom) provided streaming services.

The following information summarizes the demographics of the trial officers, jurors, and witnesses.

### Trial Officers

Prior to trial, the presiding officer, legal counsel to assist the presiding officer, trial secretary, and officer-at-large were selected.

### Jury/Trial Court

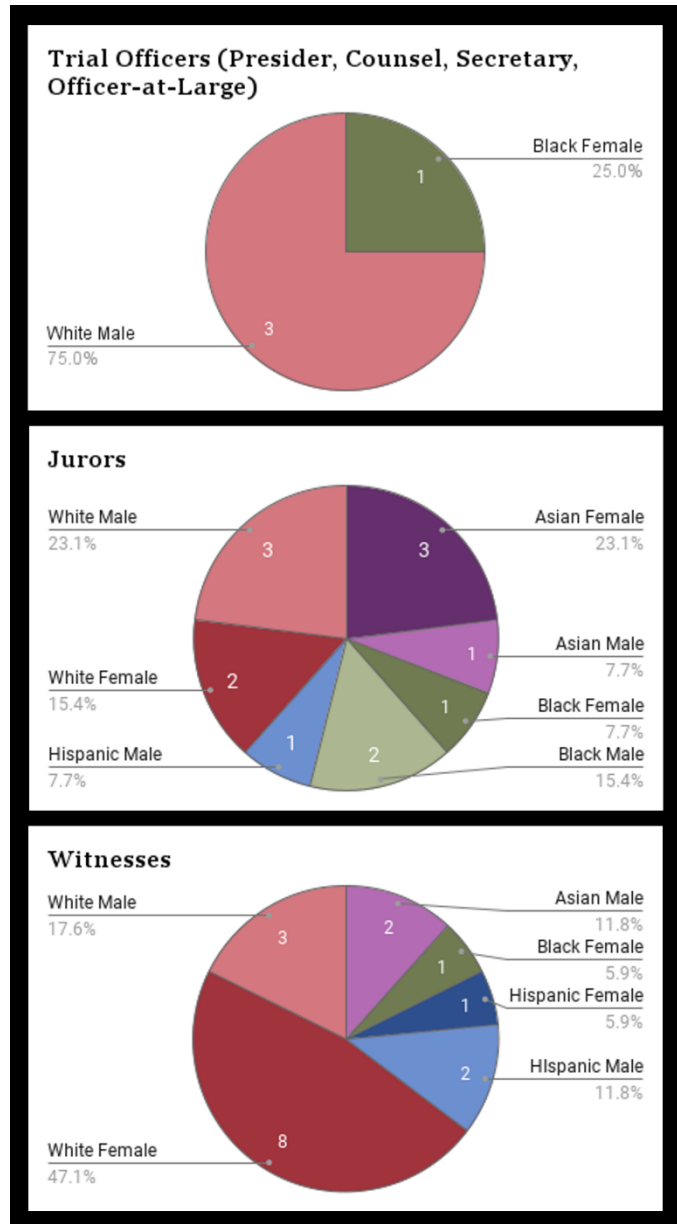
The jury selection process was explained by the presiding officer. The explanation for selection was clear and followed accordingly.

The North Central College of Bishops selected 45 ordained clergy from the jurisdiction for the jury pool. Prior to arrival at the trial, potential jurors responded, in writing, to 48 screening questions. GCSRW requested the questions be reviewed to assure they were race and gender neutral.

Of the 13 jurors selected, there were 12 elders in full connection and one deacon in full connection.

### Witnesses

The complainants presented 12 witnesses, and the respondent presented five.



## **Trial Process**

The presiding officer, secretary, officer-at-large, Wespeth personnel, and the Northern Illinois Annual Conference staff set the tone for hospitality and care for trial participants and observers. The presiding officer opened each morning with a centering moment and prayer and took great care to explain the roles and duties of all participants and the process that would be followed each day. At the beginning of the trial, the presiding officer introduced monitors present from GCSRW, GCORR, and MARCHA, noting appreciation for their participation and service to The UMC. The clarity and transparency of the trial proceedings, through its leadership, was evident (e.g., the presiding officer explained to each witness the opportunity for jurors to ask questions to the witnesses). And there were times when compassion was evident in caring for trial participants (e.g., one of the counselors referenced pain described by a witness and respectfully acknowledged that questions being asked were not intended to reopen the pain).

## **Recommendations**

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### **Complaint Process Administration and Leadership**

While the environment of hospitality and fairness was exhibited in the trial, persons in leadership were predominately white and predominately male.

#### ***GCSRW challenges The United Methodist Church to:***

1. Provide training for bishops to serve as presiding officers in the manner that training is given to serve as presiders for General Conference. This would increase the pool of potential presiding officers and would allow for inclusive leadership.
2. Be intentional about equipping a diverse group of leaders to be selected for reviewing and administering each part of the complaint process (e.g., Committee on Episcopacy; Committee on Investigation; Conference Chancellors; Council of Bishops; trained mediators for the Just Resolution process).

### **Prioritizing of Trained Complainant and Respondent Support Persons**

The trial's atmosphere was tense for all parties. It was not readily apparent that trained support persons were provided or assigned for the complainants or the respondent as support persons were not readily identifiable at the trial.

#### ***GCSRW challenges The United Methodist Church to:***

1. Prioritize assigning and providing trained support persons, who are not counsel, to walk alongside complainant(s) and respondent(s). These persons must have knowledge and deep understanding of all components of the complaint process and are critical to the process of healing and support for the person they accompany before, during, and after the complaint.
2. Develop a pool of qualified support persons in each annual conference to accompany complainants and respondents (e.g., [Do No Harm training for support persons](#) and the online [Do No More Harm](#) comprehensive complaint resource).

## **Uniformity of Process in Consideration of Suspension**

During the 15 months between the date of the formal complaint with resulting suspension and charges being issued, the Church received little information about the process being followed. This lack of transparency, no matter how well-intended, raised many questions about the integrity of the process.

GCSRW's review of available records indicates missing information about the process followed and confusion about the interpretation of confidentiality during the complaint process – particularly what should be held in confidence and what could be shared. While the names of the complainants and allegations of the case are confidential, the process followed is not. The following questions are critical for determining future best practices in handling all complaints:

- What was the process and what bodies or officers were involved in the determination of the suspension?
- What was the process and what bodies or officers defined terms of the suspension?

### ***GCSRW challenges The United Methodist Church to:***

1. Develop a uniform Church process for determining suspension, including its scope, terms, and appropriateness in protecting the well-being of the complainant, the congregation, annual conference, or other context for ministry, and/or clergy (¶1362).
2. Develop a uniform process for determination and dissemination of information on the “nature of the offense” when a complaint is filed.
3. Develop and require training on the uniform definition and application of confidentiality in the complaint processes.

## **Sincere Investment in the Just Resolution Process**

Numerous inquiries were made by GCSRW to determine the attempts by all parties to reach a Just Resolution. By the fact that the trial took place, there is an inference that all attempts at Just Resolution were unsuccessful. In retrospect, the expense of the trial and the distraction from the Church's missional priorities, together with injury to relationships, cannot be ignored. Healing must be a priority and there must be a thorough analysis of what efforts were explored in attempting to reach a resolution.

### ***GCSRW challenges The United Methodist Church to:***

1. Prioritize training of the steps stated in ¶1362 that are required for any Just Resolution process.
2. Develop best practices for following a Just Resolution process in every complaint process.
3. Train and use qualified mediators in any Just Resolution process to provide the best attempt for healing and resolution for all parties involved in a complaint.
4. Require a statement by all parties involved in a complaint process that a faithful and thorough attempt, as outlined in ¶1362, has been made to come to a Just Resolution agreement prior to the bishop referring the complaint to the counsel for the Church.

This trial has shed light on the lack of uniformity of process and related practices across the denomination. The United Methodist Church has an opportunity to learn and to develop practices which reflect the highest standards in resolving formal complaints in a timely manner. That is the witness of the Church. This monitoring report is submitted according to GCSRW's mandates and with the recommendation that it be used as one instrument to guide The United Methodist Church's work going forward.