

RES 26-09 | JUST RESOLUTION BETWEEN CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP AND LA TRINIDAD UMC

SUBJECT: Start of a Just Resolution between Conference Leadership and Lay Leadership of La Trinidad UMC

Submitted by: Jason Takagi, Jonathan Chute, Liz Roark, Paul Takagi, Richard Bentley, Kathy McGuire, Myrna Jefferson-Williams, Marlon Clark, Shaun Ezekiel Clark, Jennifer Hampton, Gaye Fischer, Kristen Luevanos, Debra Shrader, Felicia McClain, Robert Chamberlin, Patty Koester

ESTIMATED FINANCIAL IMPACT: NONE

SOURCE OF STAFF TIME: NONE

WHEREAS, Rev. Dr. Siosaia Tu’itahi, District Superintendent of the West District contacted the Interfaith Credit Union to freeze the accounts of La Trinidad UMC incorrectly claiming the Book of Discipline gave him the authority to do this, and

WHEREAS, only after this, did the district superintendent call a special charge conference of La Trinidad UMC under ¶250 of the Book of Discipline for October 19, 2025 to remove 3 of the lay leaders of La Trinidad UMC, and

WHEREAS, the special charge conference on October 19, 2025 voted to affirm the leadership of the 3 lay leaders of La Trinidad UMC, and

WHEREAS, allegations have been made regarding the conduct and voting status of Rev. Paige Eaves, Assistant to the Bishop during the special charge conference on October 19, 2025, and

WHEREAS, ¶2704.4a of the Book of Discipline states, “In all cases, the pastor or district superintendent should take pastoral steps to resolve any grievances or complaints. Such steps may include a just resolution.”, and

WHEREAS, the procedure in ¶2704.4 of the Book of Discipline regarding a complaint against a lay person was not followed and a committee on investigation as per ¶2704.4a of the Book of Discipline was not appointed and thus was not able as per ¶2704.b of the Book of Discipline to vote to recommend that the charged professing members be suspended from exercising any Church office pending conclusion of the trial process, and

WHEREAS, the conference leadership instead retained the services of Daniel F. Lula of the Rimon law firm to send the 3 lay leaders cease and desist letters, file temporary restraining orders against them, and sue them in secular court, and

WHEREAS, the Bishop and Cabinet used ¶2549.4b of the Book of Discipline to immediately close La Trinidad UMC, thus preventing La Trinidad UMC from electing replacements for the 3 lay leaders, depriving La Trinidad UMC of voice and vote at this annual conference, and appointed people who were not former members of La Trinidad UMC as the officers of the church’s corporation, and

WHEREAS, by not following the judicial process laid out in ¶2704.4 of the Book of Discipline, “When respondent is a layperson”, and instead relying on secular courts, the lay leaders have not had the opportunity to show that their actions were done to strengthen the ministries of the United

1 Methodist Church and were deprived of the rights and protections laid out in ¶¶2701-2720 of the
2 Book of Discipline, “Fair Process in Judicial Proceedings”, and

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4 **WHEREAS**, a secular court is not equipped to and will not determine if a lay leader acted in the
5 best interests of the United Methodist Church, and

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7 **WHEREAS**, ¶604.8 of the Book of Discipline states, “The annual conference shall have the power
8 to make inquiry into the financial status of the local churches, and where there is a deficit in
9 finances, it may require the pastor and the lay member to appear before the appropriate committee.
10 Based upon its findings, it shall provide counsel to help the church overcome the deficit position.”,
11 and

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13 **WHEREAS**, ¶604.4 of the Book of Discipline states, “The annual conference shall have the power
14 to make inquiry into the moral and official conduct of its clergy members.”, and

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16 **WHEREAS**, passing a resolution of disapproval against the Bishop and the Cabinet is an
17 extraordinary measure, yet the Bishop and the Cabinet have taken extraordinary actions against the
18 elected lay leadership of a local church, depriving them of their rights under ¶¶2701-2720 of the
19 Book of Discipline, “Fair Process in Judicial Proceedings”.

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21 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific Annual
22 Conference disapproves of how Bishop Dottie Escobedo-Frank and the Cabinet have handled the
23 dispute with La Trinidad UMC and the use of the secular court system instead of the procedures laid
24 out in the Book of Discipline and urges the Bishop and the Cabinet to follow the procedures laid
25 out in the Book of Discipline to resolve any disputes between Conference leadership and the lay
26 leadership of La Trinidad UMC and any disputes in the future between Conference leadership and
27 the lay leadership of a local church, and

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29 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of California-Pacific
30 Annual Conference disapproves of the civil lawsuit filed on behalf of the Conference against the 3
31 lay leaders of La Trinidad UMC, and

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33 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of California-Pacific
34 Annual Conference strongly encourages the use of an experienced, biblically-based church
35 mediation service such as Lombard Mennonite Peace Center that has a significant track record of
36 working troubled religious groups in ways that all the parties in a dispute may arrive at a mediated,
37 mutually agreed upon resolution that may also help to heal broken relationships, and

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39 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that should the just resolution process fail the
40 42nd session of the California-Pacific Annual Conference urges that the procedure laid out in
41 ¶2704.4 of the Book of Discipline, “When respondent is a layperson” is followed to determine if the
42 actions of the 3 lay leaders warrant their suspension from exercising the Church offices they were
43 elected to, and

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45 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific
46 Annual Conference urges that the closure of La Trinidad UMC be postponed until there is time for
47 the just mediation process to be completed and/or after completion of the complaint process
48 against the 3 lay leaders of La Trinidad UMC so that the procedures in ¶¶2701-2720 of the Book of
49 Discipline, “Fair Process in Judicial Proceedings” can be followed and so that the annual conference

1 may exercise its power under ¶604.8 of the Book of Discipline to, “make inquiry into the financial
2 status of the local churches”, and
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4 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific
5 Annual Conference disapproves of using civil legal intimidation against members of the Conference
6 and disapproves of the legal actions taken by Daniel F. Lula on behalf of the Conference, and urges
7 that the relationship between the Conference and Daniel F. Lula and the Rimon law firm be severed
8 as soon as possible, and
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10 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific
11 Annual Conference, requests that the Conference Council on Finance and Administration, review
12 the agreement with the Rimon law firm and report back to the annual conference the total amount
13 paid to the Rimon law firm and any other costs to the Conference as the result of using the secular
14 court system instead of the procedures laid out in the Book of Discipline and conduct a cost analysis
15 to assist the annual conference determine what the cost difference was between using the secular
16 court system instead of the procedures laid out in the Book of Discipline to resolve the dispute
17 between Conference leadership and the lay leadership of La Trinidad UMC, and
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19 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific
20 Annual Conference, requests that the annual conference Board of Trustees submit a report to the
21 annual conference of the disposition of all real and personal, tangible and intangible property of La
22 Trinidad UMC that vested in the annual conference board of trustees when La Trinidad UMC was
23 closed due to exigent circumstances per ¶2549.4b of the Book of Discipline, and
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25 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 42nd session of the California-Pacific
26 Annual Conference urges that at a future annual conference, a standing rule be adopted by the
27 annual conference, following that statement in ¶2549.4b of the Book of Discipline that, “the annual
28 conference board of trustees who may hold or dispose of such property in its sole discretion, subject
29 to any standing rule of the annual conference” to prevent the annual conference board of trustees
30 from disposing of any property of a local church closed due to exigent circumstances until the
31 annual conference has decided whether or not to formally close the local church, and
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33 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that 42nd session of the California-Pacific
34 Annual Conference affirms ¶604.8 of the Book of Discipline and does not delegate the, “power to
35 make inquiry into the financial status of the local churches” and if La Trinidad UMC is not closed,
36 requires that the pastor and the lay member of La Trinidad UMC appear before the Committee on
37 Equitable Compensation, under its responsibility, in ¶624.2d of the Book of Discipline to submit,
38 “an arrearage policy to the annual conference” to explain the allegations made by Rev. Dr. Siosaia
39 Tu’itahi, District Superintendent of the West District at the charge conference held on October 19,
40 2025, regarding not paying the pastor, and also requires that the pastor and lay member of La
41 Trinidad appear before the annual conference Board of Trustees under its responsibility in ¶2512.4
42 of the Book of Discipline, “to safeguard and protect the interests and rights of the annual
43 conference anywhere and in all matters relating to property and rights to property” to explain what
44 amounts are owed the annual conference and a plan to pay back the annual conference.