

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Jonathan Bailie
10390 Roosevelt Blvd
Clearwater, FL 33762

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The One Hundred and Six Churches that Filed Suit Respond to Bishop Carter's Misleading Open Letter Sent to the Conference | July 2022

[The National Center for Life and Liberty]

[CLEARWATER, FL, JULY 2022] — In response to the one hundred and six United Methodist churches that filed suit in Bradford County in the State of Florida, Bishop Carter released a misleading communication that was very disheartening to the plaintiffs mischaracterizing the lawsuit and intentions of the churches.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association released a statement that clarified its position: "The Discipline continues to be selectively enforced to the detriment of traditionalists, our traditionalist churches, and our faith commitments. For decades we have been in fervent prayer, sought compromise, and desired negotiation – all to no avail. We have patiently endured, only to see promises, vows, and polity broken to suit those in power."

In his open letter, the Bishop stated that the departing churches would harm Methodism and the conference; however, The Protocol, negotiated and supported by Bishop Ken Carter and others, would have provided the same basic framework for separation sought by the churches through this litigation.

The churches believe that the hastily passed paragraph 2553 of the *Discipline* is onerous, inequitable, and unequally applied across the connection. Additionally, few churches can afford to pay outright the unnecessarily exorbitant unfunded pension liability. The unfunded pension liability could be guaranteed through a promissory note keeping the payment from financially devastating the departing churches. This is the request the churches made pre-suit, which is reasonable and in good faith. Further, the conference refused to negotiate and even meet before filing the lawsuit.

The WCA statement went on to say that "our prayers are for everyone involved to experience grace and reconciliation through a fair and just separation. There is no need for continued fighting. Since the Bishop continues to proclaim his support of the Protocol, let us use it as a guide to depart. This act would embody a heart of peace. We call upon Bishop Ken Carter and our Conference leadership to let us go."

As stated in the complaint, the churches tried to settle this matter with the Florida Annual Conference. Speaking for the Annual Conference and Bishop, the Chancellor categorically refused any pre-suit negotiations forcing the plaintiffs to seek relief from the court. The churches hope the Bishop will reconsider for the good of everyone involved in this situation.