

Iliff president's exit leads to church probe: Charges of racist pressures

News in the [July 27, 2004](#) issue

Two national United Methodist agencies are looking into disputes surrounding the sudden retirement of the first Latino president of Iliff School of Theology in Denver. One commission is looking into charges of racist pressures, although the Denver-based UMC bishop recently said the “roots of the present crisis are very deep” at the 112-year-old seminary.

David Maldonado, 61, retired May 26—a few days before graduation ceremonies—following an investigation by the Iliff Board of Trustees into what it called “divisions” on campus, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*. Maldonado was on the faculty of Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology before becoming Iliff’s president in mid-2000.

The newspaper reported that Maldonado had accused the Iliff board in March of abandoning him to faculty pressure. “The faculty leadership has accused me of being too theologically conservative or moderate and that I do not fit,” he said. “This includes references to the fact I am culturally different.”

Bishop H. Warner Brown told delegates at a church convention June 19 that he will cooperate with the inquiry by the denomination’s General Commission on Race and Religion. However, “the issues are more complex,” added Brown, an Iliff trustee.

Another seminary board member, Stan Perea, told the *News*, “There’s no doubt it was a forced retirement. One of the things we value at Iliff is diversity, but I think there is a lot of insensitivity and cultural differences there.” German Acevedo-Delgado, who heads the commission’s Hispanic caucus, said reports gathered by early June indicated to him that race “was a factor” in Maldonado’s departure.

The denomination’s University Senate, a national body headed by Henry N. Tisdale, president of Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, said it would collaborate with the race commission in the two-part investigation, reported the

United Methodist News Service.

“The purpose of this activity is to ‘clear the air,’ thus assisting Iliff School of Theology to move forward with integrity,” Tisdale said. “The University Senate recognizes the important role that Iliff School of Theology plays in developing leadership for the United Methodist Church, and by this action, seeks to strengthen its capacity to do so.” Maldonado, a recently elected member of the University Senate, will not participate in the senate’s investigation, Tisdale said.