

Bishop Charged With Manslaughter for Alleged Drunken Hit-and-Run Death

Vehicular manslaughter charges are being filed against a Maryland Episcopal bishop, accused of texting and drunken driving in a hit-and-run accident that killed a cyclist, a Maryland prosecutor said on Friday.

Police said Heather Cook, the first female bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, veered into a bike lane in suburban Baltimore and crashed her sports utility vehicle into Tom Palermo, 41, on Dec. 27, Baltimore City State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby said.

"The State's Attorney's Office is committed to applying justice fairly and equally – no one is above the law," Mosby said in a statement.

In addition to negligent manslaughter by vehicle, Cook, 58, faces charges including negligently driving under the influence of alcohol resulting in a homicide and failing to remain at the scene of an accident resulting in death.

Cook is suspected of striking Palermo, who slammed into the windshield her 2001 Subaru, and fleeing the collision scene to return to her apartment, prosecutors said. She returned to the crash site about 30 minutes later.

Upon her return, police gave Cook a breathalyzer test revealing a blood-alcohol level of .22 percent, more than twice the legal limit, prosecutors said.

"On behalf of everyone in the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, please know that we are deeply heartbroken over this, and we cry for the Palermo family, our sister Heather and all in the

community who are hurting,” head Bishop Eugene Sutton said in response to the charges.

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland has placed Cook on administrative leave in the wake of the investigation, the organization said in a statement.

The church is conducting an internal investigation into the incident to determine possible disciplinary action against Cook.

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