



The Episcopal Church in Navajoland

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July 31, 2023

To the Honorable Ann K. Leppanen, Mayor
Town of Bluff
190 North 3rd East, Office PO Box 324 Bluff, UT 84512

together with:

The Honorable Jim Sayers, Council Member

The Honorable Brant Murray, Council Member

The Honorable Luanne Hook, Council Member

The Honorable Linda Sosa, Council Member

Dear Mayor Leppanen and Members of the Town Council:

We write to you on behalf of the people of St. Christopher's Episcopal Mission, and of the Episcopal Church in Navajoland. We wish to express our opposition to the Petition for Disconnection that has been submitted to you by Mr. Bruce R. Baird on behalf of Mr. Kim Eric Acton and Ms. Ida Elizabeth Acton.

St. Christopher's is currently celebrating the 80th anniversary of its founding. During three days last June, representatives of the Episcopal Church in Navajoland (an Area Mission of the Episcopal Church) gathered here for a celebration of that milestone. We were joined by official representatives of the Episcopal Church; delegates from partner churches in Ohio, Texas, Colorado, and Washington; and friends and supporters from around the country, including several residents of Bluff. St. Christopher's has a proud legacy of significant engagement with and contribution to our community, in the form of health care, education, and economic development. It has always sought to be a place for the deepening of intercultural understanding, a place that supports community healing and reconciliation. It has always been committed to the well-being of Bluff, and our current anniversary celebration includes a renewal of that commitment.

We have recently embarked on a multi-year plan to refurbish our historic buildings, and to build additional facilities in support of programs that will bring additional benefit to Bluff. One such project involves restoring the old Mission Clinic building—where an estimated 500 babies were born—and re-purposing it as a community center, where it will be possible to offer space to recovery programs, after school programs, and other programs addressing community needs. Other parts of the plan include community gardens and short-term housing facilities.

Certainly, you will recall an attempt in recent years to gain permission for oil drilling on land next to St. Christopher's. That attempt was opposed and defeated by a broad coalition of organizations, including indigenous communities, faith communities, and numerous persons concerned to protect the aquifer located there. Bluff has a vital interest in continuing that protection. Not only do we see no positive reason for disconnection generally; we can easily imagine how disconnection might open the door to another such attempt to gain permission to bore holes through the aquifer, putting an essential water resource at risk. That resource has been enjoyed and relied upon by St. Christopher's and the wider community for many decades; if it were to be compromised by extraction activities on the property in question, it could be lost forever as a source of reliably clean water.

Mr. Baird's Petition seeks to change the status quo, not for any positive reason, or to end or avoid any conspicuous harm to his clients. Why then so forceful a demand for change? He states that Mr. and Mrs. Acton's property "cannot reasonably be served by Bluff with any municipal services." But St. Christopher's certainly can be served, even as we seek to contribute and serve in return. To concede that their tax obligations for the property are "miniscule," and yet claim that disconnection is a matter of "justice and equity" seems a gross exaggeration, at best. Justice and equity are not served by an action that completely disregards the interests of St. Christopher's, its historic relationship with Bluff, and its desire to continue to develop that relationship.

Not only is there no positive reason for this change; the only substantial argument comes in the form of a naked threat: give us what we want, or be sued. It is important to notice that attached to this threat is an expression of a willingness to "waste a fortune" of public money. In this absence of civic-mindedness, this total lack of concern for the well-being of the people of Bluff, appeals to justice and equity are exposed as hollow rhetoric. And how long, we wonder, before St. Christopher's becomes the target of such bullying?

We greatly appreciate your consideration of our concerns. We are certainly eager to find a solution to this conflict that is truly just and equitable. We want to be good neighbors to all concerned. And we hope that the relationship between St. Christopher's and Bluff will continue to grow and flourish for many decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Barry L. Beisner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

The Rt. Rev. Barry L. Beisner.
Rector and Bishop Provisional