

Mr. Pence Jacob  
Secretary, Church Building Committee  
Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington  
322 Ethan Allen Avenue  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Date: June 1, 2020

Mr. Sidney Katz  
Montgomery County Council  
Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Avenue, 5th Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Water and Sewer Category Change 19-CLO-03A: Buddy O'Keefe Family Trust (for Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington), Snowdens Manor Enlarged, Parcels P032 & P053.

Dear Mr. President and Councilpersons:

On behalf of the Mar Thoma Church of Washington (the "Church"), please accept the following written testimony in support of the subject water and sewer category change request (19-CLO-03A).

**The Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington (MTCGW)**

- Is a Christian church community that has been worshipping in Maryland. More information about the Mar Thoma Church (the parent church) is given below.
- From 1981 to 1995 the MTCGW community worshipped in several rented facilities including the St. Michael's and All Angels Episcopal Church on New Hampshire Avenue.
- Since October 1995, the MTCGW has been worshipping at its own facility located at 322 Ethan Allen Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.
- Most church members are 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation U.S. immigrants from Kerala, India.
- Although most of our members are from Kerala, our church's ethnic makeup is diverse with Caucasians, African Americans, Chinese and Pilipino members who have assimilated primarily through intercultural marriages.

**MTCGW's Ecumenical and Community Outreach**

- The Mar Thoma Church is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches in USA (NCC-USA)
- Since 1995, MTCGW has served as an integral part and worthy neighbor of the Takoma Park community in Maryland.
- MTCGW is a participant in the Montgomery County Inter Faith Council meetings and activities.

- MTCGW is also a member of the Ecumenical Council of Kerala Christians (ECKC) in the Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) areas. ECKC represents 16 churches of Kerala origin in the DMV area.

### **Our Current Need**

- In 1995, when MTCGW first moved to Ethan Allen Avenue the church had about 60 member families of whom about 36 (60%) families attended regular church services.
- In 2020, we have about 125 member families and about 75 (60%) families attend church regularly.
- As the growth has doubled MTCGW is looking to construct a new and modern church facility subject to obtaining all pertinent approvals from the Montgomery County officials.

### **Our Request**

- MTCGW requests the Montgomery County Council and County Officials' to support its endeavor to move from the Takoma Park, MD church facility to a new church facility that is to be constructed at the O'Keefe Apple Orchard (O'Keefe property), 15400 New Hampshire Ave in Cloverly, MD.
- MTCGW seeks the Montgomery County Councils and County Officials' approval the Water & Sewer Category Change that would be required for MTCGW to purchase the O'Keefe property and construct a new church facility.

### **Other reasons that strongly support this request:**

- We are a community that has existed in District 2 of Montgomery County since 1995. Our church has been worshipping in Takoma Park, Maryland. The proposed move is to Cloverly, which is within the same District 2 of Montgomery County, Maryland.
- Most of our members reside in Montgomery County and many live in the Silver Spring area.
- The proposed new church development adheres to all County and State requirements.
- The church will be primarily used for worship on Sundays, and for special events on Saturdays.
- The rich traditions and history of the Mar Thoma Church will add value and diversity to the Montgomery County in Maryland.

### **About the Mar Thoma Church (the parent church):**

In English the Syriac words "Mar Thoma" stands for Saint Thomas. The Mar Thoma (St. Thomas) Church is a Christian church with Eastern traditions. The church traces its origins to the Apostle Thomas (one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ) who is believed to have visited India in about AD 52 and established 7 churches in the western Malabar Coast of India, which is now known as the State of Kerala. The faith of the Mar Thoma church is rooted in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible and in the Nicene Creed.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Mar Thoma Christians lived in a few districts in Kerala, India. In the 20th-century, Mar Thoma Christians migrated to different parts of the world, including North America, Europe, the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The Church (Sabha) is led by a Metropolitan along with 10 other bishops, and is served by 1166 clergy (active and retired). It has 13 dioceses, including the Diocese of North America and Europe, and about 1 million registered members worldwide. It has a democratic pattern of administration with a representative assembly, an executive church Council and an

Episcopal Synod. Each of its dioceses also has a representative Diocesan Assembly and an executive Diocesan Council. The church's world headquarters is located at the SCS Campus in Tiruvalla, Kerala, India. The headquarters for the Diocese of North America and Europe is located at the Diocesan Center, 2320 Merrick Avenue, Merrick, New York 11566.

The Mar Thoma Church is an autonomous church with Eastern traditions and eclectic characteristics from the Reformation era. The Mar Thoma Church maintains cordial ecumenical relations with many world churches and is a member of the World Council of Churches from its inception, and a member of the National Council of Churches in USA. The Mar Thoma church is apostolic in origin, universal in nature, evangelical in principle, ecumenical in outlook, oriental in worship and Episcopal in character.

For any additional information please contact:

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Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Mr. Pence Jacob  
Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington