

## The Episcopal Church in Navajoland

### Narrative Budget

From 1864-1868, in what was known as “the Long Walk,” the Diné were violently rounded up from their homelands by the U.S. Government Cavalry and force-marched to an imprisonment camp at Bosque Redondo, Fort Sumner N.M. The Diné remember this tragic event as, “The Place of Suffering,” and it resulted in generational grief trauma and poverty that still affect them today. After being freed, as part of the 1868 Treaty, the U.S Government ordered that the Diné agree to Christian assimilation and have their children attend residential Boarding Schools.

It was then that the Episcopal Church’s ministry to the Diné began, over 100 years ago, as hospital missions in Bluff, Utah; Fort Defiance, Arizona; and Farmington, New Mexico, known as St Christopher’s Mission, Good Shepherd Mission, and San Juan Mission each expanded to include two congregations in nearby communities. The Episcopal Church in Navajoland (ECN) came to see itself as called to serve a population struggling to regain their Diné traditional way of life, only to find it difficult to adapt to the rapidly changing western modern culture.

In 1976, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church voted, “to unify Navajo work into a single jurisdiction as an area mission, a structure requiring appointment -not election- of its bishop,” (400 Years by Dr. Owanah Anderson, former Indian Missioner of the Episcopal Church). Since 1976, Navajoland has had eight bishops serve the Area Mission. Two bishops– the late Rt. Rev. Steven Plummer and the Rt. Rev. David Bailey, were the only diocesan bishops in Navajoland. In 1990 Rev. Steven Plummer was ordained a bishop, at the selection by the Diné of the Area Mission. Bishop Plummer’s dream and vision was to help the Diné live into the dual faith traditions of the Christian spirituality and the Diné spirituality – the two faiths of walking side by side that would enrich the Diné traditional way of life as Diné Christians by incorporating the traditional spirituality, while living into their baptismal vows. Bishop Plummer continued to served Navajoland until his death in 2005. In 2010, The Rt. Rev. David Bailey was elected bishop as ECN’s choice at a special convocation at All Saints Church, Farmington, NM. Bishop Bailey served Navajoland for 13 years until his retirement in May of 2023. In January 2023, Bishop Barry Beisner was selected by the Area Mission Standing Committee and voted by the House of Bishops to serve as provisional bishop of Navajoland. Bishop Biesner took charge over the Area Mission on May 20, 2023, until a new bishop is elected. It is time for Navajoland to look forward to electing its own bishop according to the canons of The Episcopal Church in hopes of becoming a Missionary Diocese.

ECN is at a crossroads as it contemplates petitioning the 2024 General Convention to become a Missionary Diocese. The chief benefit of such a change is that ECN would then be able to choose its own bishop. While provisional bishops have been a wonderful asset for ECN, they by their nature are part-time and reside elsewhere. ECN has embarked on many of the other aspects of a diocese with what functions as a Standing Committee, participation in the wider church with deputies to the General Convention and the Canon serving on the Executive Council.

However, there are concerns with this change in status that will need to be dealt with particularly the possibility that this change in status could result in a reduction in funding. Throughout this history ECN has struggled to achieve financial stability, just as have most of its parishioners. Parishioners give what they can to their churches but their monetary contributions are not sufficient to sustain a budget that must pay salaries and provide benefits for staff, pay utilities and maintenance for buildings and much more. The Episcopal Church has provided grants to ECN, but even those grants have not been enough to cover all budget items, including the premiums for medical insurance for its clergy. Clergy have had to rely on the Indian Health Service, which lacks high quality health care and is also striving to overcome these health care inequalities.

The concern about losing funding from The Episcopal Church, when the need is for an increase, has made it difficult to make the decision to become a Missionary Diocese. However, the wording of Canon I.11.1 referring to both Area Missions and Missionary Dioceses – “jurisdictions for which this Church as a whole assumes a special responsibility” - gives us hope of further aid.

Attached is a proposed budget for ECN. This includes funding for medical insurance for clergy and staff as well as funding, starting in 2025, for a full- time bishop. Grants from The Episcopal Church are essential for the ongoing work of ECN. In the past the Presiding Bishop Office has supplied funds to support a provisional bishop and diocesan staff for which ECN is most grateful. But the future of such funding from whoever may be our next Presiding Bishop is unknown. ECN is hopeful that the Church as a whole, through the Executive Council, will understand and to respond to the need for a commitment to ECN in the Church Budget for 2024 and succeeding years.

The people of Navajoland, while with only very limited monetary means, have been generous with their talents to ECN and its people. ECN has begun work on sustainability to assist with ECN’s operations. Shíma Soap based at Good Shepherd Mission is one of ECN’s sustainability projects that contributes to ECN. Presently, the Utah Region sustainability projects at St Christopher’s Mission are underway. Building permits have been issued, Seven tiny house kits were received in 2022 and are near completion with the hopes to bring revenue from mission group pilgrimages, healing and reconciliation

retreats in meeting the needs of the community. What we will be evaluating is the net increase in rental income to the Utah Region to contribute to the ECN budget. Expansion of the administrative staff to include additional administrators in the Utah Region with St Christopher's Mission as the administrative center, and the Southeast Region with Good Shepherd Mission as the administrative center will be necessary to manage the rental arrangements, to assist with mission groups and other visitors, and to manage the bookkeeping and other accounting functions. These additions will improve the efficiency and accuracy of our work, provide increased organization and communication, greater collaboration, and will free the clergy from administrative functions that are seriously hindering their ability to offer the pastoral ministry of building up the church. In the near future, we are looking toward the New Mexico region for sustainability projects that would be feasible with income development. The Economic Development Corporation of ECN is working with ECN, assisting with fundraising and creating active relationships with potential large donors to the ECN operations with the hope of establishing endowment funds. In addition, ECN has created a food pantry program that benefits annually over 900 families and has brought people into the ECN congregations, first as volunteers, and then as parishioners. Needless to say, this program has reduced the poverty of people during this period of job layoffs and has made for a more cohesive community.

Moreover, we just received approval for \$150K for medical insurance for 2024 from DFMS and the Church Pension Group may grant a reduction in premium of \$75,000 per year beginning in 2025. In that event ECN will need an additional \$225K for 2025-2027 for medical insurance which is reflected in the total need shown in the attached budget. While the Area Mission is at a critical time discerning to become a Missionary Diocese, plans for a Bishop's Compensation is included in the budget for 450K for the triennium. The Area Mission is asking for additional dollars to the 2023 DFMS Block Grant of \$100,000 in 2024, \$400,000 in 2025, \$400,000 in 2026 and \$400,000 in 2027. These numbers are reflected in the net gain/loss in the attached budget.

On behalf of the Diné, I am most sincerely grateful for your time and consideration with reviewing the request of the Diné. Ahéhéé – thank you!

Sincerely,

Rev. Cornelia Eaton, Canon to the Ordinary

January 2024