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Medha[redacted]lem Eritrean
Orthodox Tewahdo Church
P.O.Box 12162
Washington, D.C. 20005

By Hand:

September 21, 2000

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
2000 SEP 22 PM 2:14

Ms. Jerrily Kress, FIA, Director
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW
Room 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Board of Zoning Adjustment Application for Zoning Relief for 4700 14th Street, NW, Case Number 16632

Dear Ms. Kress:

We respectfully request that the above case can be expedited and be heard at the soonest possible time, due to the fact that we are facing certain collapse of our Church due to the fact that we have purchased this building, and we cannot use it and have lost our temporary place of worship. The only variance we need is for parking, and we are certain there will be no neighborhood opposition to us. The following paragraphs explain about the history of our church, and why we are at this point and need to seek zoning relief in the first place, and why we have substantial hardship presented by time delays which are necessary but which are also destroying our congregation.

Starting in the early 70's refugees and immigrants from the East African Country of Eritrea were praying with different Orthodox Christian churches in the metropolitan area. Because of the language barrier, lack of proper communication, and the absence of ritual in our own language, we were hoping and dreaming to have our own church and ritual in our own language.

In late 1991, the arrival of Abba Dawit Aklom, an Eritrean Priest, in the Washington Metropolitan area brought together a few friends in hopes to establish a church. We contacted Abba Dawit Aklom about establishing a church and he was more than happy to serve. Even though, there were difficulties finding a place, we managed to get a place in the compound of the National Cathedral.

After use of the facility for approximately a year and half, we were told by the facility administrator priest that they needed the place for extended service and therefore, we were not able to use the facility no longer than 60-90 days. We started looking for a place and found a couple of classrooms in the Indo-Chinese Community Center on 16th street. Temporary arrangements there lasted for a couple years. Eventually, we were granted the use of the Ella Williams Lounge at Simpson-Hamline United Methodist Church at 4501 16th Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20011. At that time we were no more than 15 members and approximately additional 15 followers. By December 1999, the number of members has increased to 52.

BZA
Case No. 16632
Exhibit No. 12

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16632
EXHIBIT NO.12

Due to the small size of the Ella Williams Lounge over crowding became a problem. For safety reasons we were notified to find a larger facility. We looked forward to purchasing our own church. However, the amount of funds we had on hand did not allow for purchasing at that time. Luckily, we found an affordable building at 4700 14th Street N.W., Washington D.C. and addressed the congregation.

Hoping to have our own church, the congregation raised the funds and purchased the building. Prior to signing the contract, we had Mr. Seyoum Aradom, an architect, do a feasibility study to convert the existing facility to a church.

Mr. Aradom contacted the D.C. Zoning Department and he was informed that the property is zoned C1 and can be used as a church. On this basis we were told to submit the architectural drawing and the application to obtain a Permit of Occupancy. We paid BOCI, Inc. $1500 to design a floor plan according to the required specification Mr. Aradom received from the D.C. Zoning Department.

Last March, Mr. Yemane Meresie and Mr. Gebregiorgies Girmai went to apply for a Permit of Occupancy with the architectural drawing and application. At that time, they were told the property couldn't be used for a church unless we have ample parking spaces.

The use of the Ella Williams Lounge at Simpson-Hamline United Methodist Church terminated last Sunday, August 27, 2000. The congregation has no place to continue services starting Sunday, September 3, 2000. It was very painful to inform the congregation that we do not have a place to worship beginning September 3rd. All members were very saddened and their eyes were full of tears. It was extremely difficult for our Priest to attempt to comfort the congregation by quoting from the Holy Bible "even the Disciples were evicted".

The required application to the Board of Zoning Adjustment for the District of Columbia was completed and a hearing was scheduled for sometime in December 2000. Since we have no place at present to worship, there is a fear of losing members to other congregations, the moral of the members will drop severely, the children may lose interest and go astray as well as the adults becoming disoriented. As a result, we are asking that you reconsider the date of December 2000 and reschedule the hearing to the earliest possible date.

If you have any questions you may reach me at (301) 588-8451 home, (301) 443-2083 work, and (301) 443-8467 cell.

We will greatly appreciate your utmost consideration in this matter.

May God Bless You,

Berhane Yitbarek, Secretary
Berhane Yitbarek
Medhane Alem Eritrean Orthodox
Tewahdo Church Congregation