

August 22, 2017

Honorable Michael Pence
Old Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. Vice President,

In your role as the 48th Vice President of the United States, we pray for your leadership and service to our nation and people.

The faith community has long advocated for clean water, clean air and protection of our lands as part of our stewardship of God's creation and as our moral responsibility to future generations. We are also committed to caring for God's people and faithfully preserving the history of their stories. In your role as Vice President, we urge you to take leadership in protecting God's good creation for all Americans.

President Trump put forth in his Inaugural Address the need for unity, stating that we share one heart and one home. This sentiment is truly manifest in the diversity of our public lands—parks, monuments, and living classrooms that showcase the variety of stories that unite us.

In our nation's majestic national parks, forests, or monuments you will find God's presence, inspiration and peace in nature. National parks such as the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone are such places.

Our nation's parks are also a faithful reflection of our country's heritage and history. The designations of Birmingham, Freedom Riders and Reconstruction Era National Monuments showcase our country's Civil Rights history. The designations of Bears Ears showcase Native American culture and spirituality. These historic sites join other important designations made by previous U.S. Presidents, courtesy of the Antiquities Act, which are critical to our heritage. Together, our national parks and monuments honor our continued struggle as a nation toward equality for all.

On June 8, we celebrate the anniversary of the Antiquities Act and take heed of the many lands and stories that have been commemorated by the act. Most notable among the nation's Antiquities Act designations are World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument in Hawai'i – protected so that "Americans will never forget the harrowing sacrifices made in the Pacific by soldiers and civilians." Hovenweep National Monument preserves six villages once inhabited by the ancestors of today's Pueblo people. Cesar E. Chavez National Monument celebrates this influential Latino leader, and the farmworkers he championed. But, perhaps our most well-known and most-visited national monument is the one that lifts up our shared story: the Statue of Liberty.

Stewardship of our national parks, monuments and other public lands and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage is an important part of our moral responsibility as caretakers of God's creation and for the next generation. The Antiquities Act is an important tool in protecting the special places of God's Creation where we play, pray, and learn. The Act authorizes every President to proclaim "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" as national monuments.

Our responsibility to care for Creation is coupled with our duty to preserve and honor the story of all Americans, and ensure all of our children have equitable access to healthy recreation and the opportunity to find their own story in our park system.

Regardless of our race, religion or heritage, these stories of courage, conviction, and fortitude are reflections of each of us. These monuments document a journey for justice, a core component of our own faith story.

We urge the Administration to preserve and protect our public lands and to not rescind or rollback any designations. We look forward to working with you and with President Trump to fulfill our stewardship responsibilities to our system of national parks, monuments and other public lands, and honor our heritage. We hope to work with you to elevate attention to our moral responsibility to care for God's Creation, and each other.

Sincerely,

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Rev. Mitch Hescoc, President and CEO
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