

Nevada Tax Exemption Bill Passes into Law



The Governor of the State of Nevada, Brian Sandoval, on May 25, 2015 signed into law legislation revising the religious property tax exemption statute in the state of Nevada. This important amendment to the law effectively treats all religious organizations in the state equally, irrespective of how they worship, for the purposes of receiving property tax exemption. Therefore, as of July 1, 2015, the Red Rock Consecrated Sanctuary will be 100{1fa2ef75e2e78439128d99df03acfe1d8ee3047374abe3d4676fe3470f8b909} tax exempt after a long and arduous chapter in the life of The Community spanning some thirty-five years since 1980.

The bi-partisan bill, crafted by Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. with legal advice, was passed unanimously in the State Assembly and the State Senate. Both Democrats and Republicans supported the revised language to the law. The elected officials of Washoe County, and their staffs as well, supported Bishop Savoy's two-and-a-half year campaign, thus putting behind a long history of misunderstanding between the Washoe County Tax Assessor's office and the International Community of Christ.

Washoe County Assessor Michael Clark, who was newly elected in November 2014, attended the first Nevada Assembly meeting on the bill as an interested party. When he left that first meeting, he said he reviewed the Church's files on the case and found that mistakes had been made in the past. Since that time Mr. Clark said he was behind the bill one-hundred percent; he even spoke on behalf of the bill as it was going through the Senate Tax Committee.

Many within the interfaith and interreligious community in Northern Nevada also offered their support once the bill came to committee in the Nevada Assembly – delegations from the Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and other churches, the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu communities, as well as professionals and private citizens all over Nevada.

However, this accomplishment could not have been realized without the dedication, commitment and expertise of Frank and Michael Hillerby of the firm Kaempfer Crowell, the lobbyists hired by Bishop Savoy, who worked with him over a period of two-and-one-half years and who fully supported the cause from the outset. Without them, the Community's effort to modify existing legislation may not have succeeded.

The Community's struggle for property tax exemption at the Red Rock Consecrated Sanctuary began in the early 1980's. When the Sanctuary was purchased, Washoe County initially granted property tax exemption . Unfortunately, that was later revoked, and the Community sued Washoe County in district court. The suit was successful. However, the Community's court case with Washoe County from 1980 to 1990 cost the Community well over \$100,000 in legal fees and one decade in precious time.

Then in 1990 the County appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court and the decision was reversed in 1990, and the ill-fated Supreme Court decision cost the Community over \$400,000 in back and forward taxes and assessments over the past 35 years.

When lobbyists Frank and Michael Hillerby of the law firm Kaempfer Crowell took an interest in the case two-and-one-half years ago, they believed they could propose an amendment to the law that would grant the Community property tax exemption on the Sanctuary specifically without involving a lawsuit or the courts. Ultimately, Bishop Savoy chose not to seek specific tax exemption for the Red Rock Sanctuary only but to seek a modification of existing law that would provide tax exemption of all lands used exclusively for religious purposes by any and all recognized religious organizations.

In May 2014 this firm spoke on the Community's behalf with representatives of Washoe County, advising them of our intent to seek an amendment to the law that would grant our Sanctuary a tax exemption. The representatives of the county were supportive and said they would not oppose us making a change to the law. This was a major step forward.

The Community's lobbyists visited the Sanctuary for the first time shortly thereafter and were extremely impressed. They followed up by making appointments to speak with legislators and the Governor's office for the change to the law, which was presented in the state legislature early in 2015.

The signing ceremony with Governor Brian Sandoval is expected to take place sometime in July shortly after Independence Day.



Michael Hillerby, Rebecca Wilis, Pat Hickey, and Gene Savoy Jr. In front of the Nevada Legislature building after the Nevada Assembly Taxation Committee hearing. PHOTO: Ted Staver

Read the rest of the history of the Sanctuary's tax exemption case in the Community Communique:

[April 23, 2015: "Sanctuary Tax Exemption Bill Makes Its Way to Nevada Senate"](#)

[April 20, 2015: "Sanctuary Tax Exemption Bill Starts Its Way Through Nevada Legislature"](#)

**FALL 1991: "Church Seeks Tax Refund from County
Opposition Causes Church to Withdraw"**

< [To read the, download a copy of the FALL 1991 Community Communique here.](#) >

Bishop of The Church

The Most Right Reverend

Gene Savoy”

< [To read the article, download a copy of the SUMMER 1990 Community Communique here.](#) >

WINTER 1989-1990: “Nevada Supreme Court Hears Church’s Tax Case

Church in Court Again After Washoe County Appeal”

< [To read the article, download a copy of the WINTER 1989-1990 Community Communique here.](#) >

SUMMER 1988: “Schouweiler Grants Red Rock Sanctuaries Tax Exemption

Exemption Status Denied to the Sanctuary of New Mt. Zion”

< [To read the article, download a copy of the SUMMER 1988 Community Communique here.](#) >

SPRING 1988: “Struggle to Secure Tax Exemption on Sanctuaries Continues

Case Goes to Trial before District Court Judge Robert Schouweiler”

< [To read the article, download a copy of the SPRING 1988 Community Communique here.](#) >

WINTER 1988: “Church Makes Deposition to Washoe County Court

***District Attorney's
Office Seeks to Impose Taxes on Sanctuaries"***

< [To read the article, download a copy of the WINTER 1988
Community Communique here.](#) >

WINTER 1986: **"Church transfers civil rights suit to
Washoe District Court**

***State Court to test
validity of DA's interpretation of law"***

< [To read the article, download a copy of the WINTER 1986
Community Communique here.](#) >

WINTER 1985: **"Judge criticizes Washoe County's decision
Commissioners did not act
rationally, says magistrate"**

< [To read the article, download a copy of the WINTER 1985
Community Communique here.](#) >

FALL 1984: **"County attorney vows to fight Church:
Court orders Commissioners to
defend position"**

< [To read the article, download a copy of the FALL 1984
Community Communique here.](#) >

SPRING 1984: **"Federal suit filed
County reverses land tax-
exemption"**

"Court Order: Land remains

with Church"

< [To read the articles, download a copy of the SPRING 1984 Community Communique here.](#) >

DECEMBER 22, 1981:

"Church develops desert sanctuary as base for Second Advent Ministry"

< [To read the article, download a copy of the DECEMBER 22, 1981 Community Communique here.](#) >

December 1, 1980: "FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AT RED ROCK"

[To read the article, download a copy of the DECEMBER 1, 1980 Community Communique here.](#)

AUGUST 15, 1980: "COMMUNITY ACQUIRES LAND AND BUILDINGS"

[To read the article, download a copy of the AUGUST 15, 1980 Community Communique here.](#)

* * *

The text of the new law signed into effect on May 25, 2015 appears below. Note that *italics* indicate newly added words or phrases:

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

*Section 1. NRS 361.125 is hereby amended to read as follows:
361.125 1. Except as otherwise provided in subsection 2:*

(a) Churches, chapels, other than marriage chapels, and other buildings used for religious worship, with their furniture and

equipment, and the lots of ground on which they stand, used therewith and necessary thereto; and

(b) Parcels of land used exclusively for worship, including, without limitation, both developed and undeveloped portions of a

parcel, owned by some recognized religious society or corporation, and

parsonages so owned, are exempt from taxation.

2. Except as otherwise provided in NRS 361.157, when any such property is used exclusively or in part for any other than

church purposes, and a rent or other valuable consideration is

received for its use, the property must be taxed.

3. The exemption provided by this section must be prorated for

the portion of a fiscal year during which the religious society or

corporation owns the real property. For the purposes of this subsection, ownership of property purchased begins on the date of

recording of the deed to the purchaser.

Sec. 2. This act becomes effective on July 1, 2015.