**A** **SENATE RESOLUTION**

TO RECOGNIZE AND CONGRATULATE BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL (AME) CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE ON THE OCCASION OF ITS HISTORIC ONE HUNDRED FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY AND TO COMMEND THE CHURCH FOR A CENTURY AND A HALF OF SERVICE TO GOD AND THE COMMUNITY.

Whereas, having been founded in 1866, Bethel AME Church of St. George is celebrating its historic one hundred fiftieth anniversary in 2016; and

Whereas, in 1866, the Reverend C. Heyward and a group of dedicated followers began worshipping at a bush arbor at the present site of St. James Cemetery on Highway 15 North. This gathering was the foundation of Bethel AME. History records this event sometime following the end of the Civil War at a time when blacks were granted freedom to assemble for religious services. The roots of Bethel’s founders continue to run deep as the descendants of Reverend C. Heyward are still in the membership and serving in leadership positions; and

Whereas, about 1890, Bethel AME was moved to its present site in the heart of the black community, where the church was instrumental in providing for the educational and spiritual needs of the community. During the early 1900s, Bethel strove for excellence in religious services and became known as a leading force in religious outreach. In 1946, the church hosted the South Carolina Annual Conference, an honor Bethel has received on several occasions over the years. Through various renovations and building projects, as well as a fire that destroyed the church, Bethel AME has ministered the grace of God to its community; and

Whereas, in 2000, the Reverend Jonathan C. Roberts created an institution of learning for Bethel’s school‑aged boys and girls. Among other improvements, the church began a computer‑assisted tutorial program and was selected to spearhead a mentoring program for boys and girls through the solicitor’s office as an alternative to sending them to jail. Bethel also worked with a statewide initiative aimed at improving student reading skills; and

Whereas, in 2011, Bethel welcomed its current pastor, the Reverend John C. Smalls, who powerfully preaches the gospel and teaches God’s people about His goodness, grace, and mercy. Under Pastor Smalls’ leadership, Bethel has added to its ministry a Tuesday Bible study, community food bank, weekly community food giveaway, and Sunday evening worship service. In addition, the church has purchased a bus and a new organ, made numerous other improvements to its facilities, and purchased three properties; and

Whereas, above all, Bethel remains a strong and steadfast center of Christian activity and worship, and its people keep in their hearts the Lord’s promise found in Matthew 16:18 (KJV): “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”; and

Whereas, to mark its milestone sesquicentennial anniversary, the church will set apart a special celebratory time on Sunday, August 14, 2016; and

Whereas, Bethel AME Church has been a beacon of light and a community worship center in the St. George area for one hundred fifty years, and, God willing, will continue its godly heritage for many more years of worship and service. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate:

That the members of the South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, recognize and congratulate Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church of St. George on the occasion of its historic one hundred fiftieth anniversary and commend the church for a century and a half of service to God and the community.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be presented to Bethel AME Church.

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