**A** **SENATE RESOLUTION**

TO CONGRATULATE ST. JOHN BAPTIST CHURCH OF HOPKINS IN RICHLAND COUNTY ON THE OCCASION OF ITS HISTORIC ONE HUNDRED FORTY‑FIFTH ANNIVERSARY AND TO HONOR THE CHURCH FOR NEARLY A CENTURY AND A HALF OF SERVICE TO GOD AND THE COMMUNITY.

Whereas, founded in 1875, St. John Baptist Church of Hopkins in Richland County is celebrating its one hundred forty‑fifth anniversary of gospel ministry in 2020 and will mark the occasion on September 12‑13, 2020, with a parade and a special celebratory Zoom event; and

Whereas, in the early 1870s, Reverend Samuel Barber inaugurated a campaign to organize St. John Baptist Church in Hopkins near Chappell Creek. The progress of the church in its early years was monitored by New Light Beulah Baptist Church, the “Mother Church” of St. John Baptist; and

Whereas, according to state historical records, Reverend Phillip Shiver was the first preacher called to serve the church, but Reverend William Lowman was its first ordained minister, installed on December 1, 1875, by Reverend William W. Adams, the first pastor of New Light Beulah Baptist; and

Whereas, Ephraim Neal donated land for the first church building after members had met and worshipped in a bush arbor, or brush arbor, as it was also called. The new building faced the railroad and was adjacent to Chappell Creek, where baptisms were held. On December 14, 1878, Abigail Swygert of Columbia sold a one‑acre tract of land to the St. John trustees; and

Whereas, Reverend Lowman, who was a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1876 to 1878, served as pastor of the church from 1875 to 1885 and again from 1887 to 1893. Reverend Jesse W. Neal followed, becoming pastor in 1893 and serving the church a total of fifty‑one years; and

Whereas, Reverend Westberry H. Neal, son of Reverend Jesse Neal, succeeded his father as pastor and served for fifty‑eight years. Dr. Neal left a rich ministerial legacy, serving as pastor emeritus until his death in 2002; and

Whereas, Reverend Sammy L. Wade, a retired U.S. Army chaplain and former assistant inspector general, has served St. John Baptist faithfully since 2001, first as interim pastor and then as pastor, a post he fills with grace to this day; and

Whereas, today, St. John Baptist, like her sister churches everywhere, has had to devise creative approaches to ministry, due to COVID-19. Services are currently conducted in the open air, with preaching and music set up on the church porch and the people worshipping from the church parking lot. St. John also continues to meet the needs of the community with the help of the Lord, as with the care packages prepared for the hard‑working staff of PRISMA Health Richland and PRISMA Health Baptist; and

Whereas, by God’s grace, having weathered the storms and triumphantly celebrated the victories the years have brought, St. John Baptist continues to pass on a vibrant heritage of faith; and

Whereas, standing on the shoulders of its early pastors and members, St. John’s congregation “press[es] toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14, KJV), continuing to preach and teach the Word of God; and

Whereas, St. John Baptist Church has been a beacon of light and a community worship center in Richland County for one hundred forty‑five 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 South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, congratulates St. John Baptist Church of Hopkins in Richland County on the occasion of its historic one hundred forty‑fifth anniversary and honors the church for nearly 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 St. John Baptist Church.

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