**A** **SENATE RESOLUTION**

TO RECOGNIZE AND CONGRATULATE THE PASTOR, STAFF, AND CONGREGATION OF BETHESDA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CAMDEN, UPON THE OCCASION OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR HISTORIC SANCTUARY, AND TO WISH THEM MANY MORE YEARS OF SERVICE TO THEIR GOD AND THEIR COMMUNITY.

Whereas, the South Carolina Senate is pleased to learn that Camden’s historic Bethesda Presbyterian Church will celebrate the bicentennial anniversary of the construction of the lovely sanctuary on October 22‑23, 2022, with festivities that will include, art, music, docent presentations, food, and more; and

Whereas, even though the congregation pre‑dates the building of the sanctuary, the construction of this South Carolina treasure, commissioned by the congregation and designed by the renowned architect Robert Mills, was completed only two centuries ago; and

Whereas, the church’s bicentennial committee spent the last two years preparing for the birthday celebration, not the least of their efforts included the preparation of a succinct history; and

Whereas, the early Presbyterian worshippers shared a meeting house with Quakers before the Revolutionary War, until Camden’s founding father, Joseph Kershaw, gave land on which they would build their own meeting house. During the occupation of Camden in 1780, British General Charles Cornwallis forbade public worship, and his troops used the Presbyterian house of worship as a barracks and burned it down when they left; and

Whereas, the church was rebuilt, and a third church was built on the site of the first two. By 1820, the congregation had outgrown it, and a new church was planned at another location. Born in Charleston, iconic architect Robert Mills was commissioned to design it. He designed the church with the steeple at the front, but the new pastor in 1820 insisted it be built in the back. The congregation raised the fourteen thousand dollars needed to build the structure by selling pew titles, and the church was dedicated in October 1822; and

Whereas, in 1825, Bethesda welcomed Major General, the Marquis de Lafayette, who participated in the reinternment to a new grave in front of Bethesda for his wartime friend Johann Baron de Kalb, who died from wounds suffered during the Battle of Camden. His new resting place is topped by an obelisk designed by Robert Mills; and

Whereas, the church survived the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the 1886 Charleston earthquake, and the church was renovated in 1890 during which box seats were removed, the pulpit was lowered, and the five porches were changed. But in 1930, a project restored the church’s interior to Robert Mills’ original plans; and

Whereas, in 1985, the United States Department of the Interior designated Bethesda Presbyterian as a National Historic Landmark.

New buildings were added to the surrounding grounds of Bethesda:

John Knox Hall in 1966, which houses the Bethesda Christian School and church archives; the McArn Building in 1969, which provides offices and Sunday school classes; the diminutive Hammet Chapel in 1996, which can seat up to eighteen congregants; Westminster Hall in 2002, which serves as a multipurpose family life center; and Memorial Garden of Peace in 2009 to provide a special place for committal of loved one’s cremated remains; and

Whereas, the Camden Military Academy Color Guard with Drum & Fife Corps will open the bicentennial festivities, where local artists will have artwork on display and for sale. A Ringing of the Bells ceremony will include two hundred tolls to mark the anniversary, docents will make presentations at sites on the campus, and the 208th United States Army Band will be in concert, during all of which the community is invited to share. The church will hold a rededication service for congregants on Sunday, October 23. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate:

That the members of the South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, recognize and congratulate the pastor, staff, and congregation of Bethesda Presbyterian Church in Camden, upon the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the construction of their historic sanctuary, and wish them many more years of service to their God and their community.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be presented to Reverend Jim Davis, pastor of Bethesda Presbyterian Church.

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