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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 142

Offered January 9, 2008

Prefiled January 8, 2008

Commending Downing's United Methodist Church on the occasion of its 225th anniversary.

Patron—Lewis

WHEREAS, Downing's United Methodist Church located in Oak Hall, which celebrates its 225th anniversary in 2008, is the oldest Methodist church on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and named for Captain William Downing in whose home faithful followers of John Wesley first congregated; and

WHEREAS, though it cannot be documented, it is said that Captain Downing was converted to the faith by the Reverend Robert Williams around 1772; and

WHEREAS, the first substantiated and recorded history of the church began with writings and a visit in 1783 by noted missionary Francis Asbury, who was sent by John Wesley to organize followers in America; and Bishop Asbury visited Downing's Chapel on 13 or more occasions between 1783 and 1810; and

WHEREAS, Downing's Methodist Church quickly became one of the foremost churches on the Eastern Shore and the congregation heard regular preaching on Sundays by circuit preachers, including early inspirational Methodist ministers such as Richard Whatcoat in 1788, William McKendree in 1810, and Lorenzo Dow in 1805 and 1813; and

WHEREAS, by 1794 Captain Downing deeded the land on which Downing's Methodist Church stood to its congregation, which grew and multiplied in numbers and faith until the original church building burned in 1854; and

WHEREAS, in 1855 William and Sally Byrd deeded a quarter acre of land to the trustees of the Methodist church at a site across the road from the original chapel, and a new Downing's Methodist Church was built there for the congregation; and

WHEREAS, the 1854 Downing's Methodist Church is the oldest Methodist church building and the eighth oldest church building of all of the churches on the Eastern Shore of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the vibrant and enthusiastic members of Downing's Methodist Church nurtured the beginnings of three other area churches, the Methodist churches located in Atlantic in 1838, Temperanceville in 1845, and Pocomoke in 1853; and

WHEREAS, the Union Army occupied the town in 1861 during the Civil War, and Downing's Methodist Church was used to stable horses for the troops for many years; a ruined and dilapidated building was returned to the congregation, which they remarkably repaired and were using again by 1864; and

WHEREAS, with the coming of prosperity to Oak Hall, the railroad laid its track very close to the church's foundation; and in 1888, the railroad agreed to move the Downing's Methodist Church building to a new location at its present site on Route 13; and

WHEREAS, over the years, Downing's United Methodist Church has remained an integral partner of Oak Hall and it has continued to expand its physical building with major improvements, including the addition of a beautiful steeple and stained glass windows, as well as continue its many important missions in the community; and

WHEREAS, Downing's United Methodist Church has been served throughout its 225-year history by immensely dedicated and able pastors and lay leaders, who have provided exceptional leadership and inspirational ministry; and

WHEREAS, throughout its long history, Downing's United Methodist Church has provided its devoted congregation, its neighbors, and the community a place to worship, to help others, and to grow in faith and service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Downing's United Methodist Church on the occasion of its 225th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Downing's United Methodist Church as an expression of the General Assembly's best wishes for a joyful celebration and future success in its ministry.

INTRODUCED

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