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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 1016

Offered February 17, 2017

Commending Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Patrons—Price, Helsel, Mullin and Yancey; Senators: Locke, Mason and Norment

WHEREAS, Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Newport News is celebrating the 130th anniversary of its founding in 2017; and

WHEREAS, the roots of Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church can be traced to 1887, when the Reverend Isaac L. Butts saw a need to organize a Sunday school at Freeman Crossing, out of which the present church grew from the first place of worship on 18th Street known as "The Acre" in the "Hell's Kitchen" neighborhood of Newport News; and

WHEREAS, in 1900, the cornerstone of the new brick structure was laid, and among the first members were George Freeman, W. J. Gordon, Jerry Haywood, and others who mortgaged their properties to raise money to complete construction of the brick building; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Haywood, the lay leader of the movement to build the new church, who played a vital role in securing financing for the building, was given the honor of naming the church and he chose "Saint Paul" after his home church in North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, over the next 50 years, Saint Paul A.M.E. Church grew and was improved spiritually and physically by the many notable pastors who served the congregation, including the Reverend George C. Taylor, the Reverend A. J. Nottingham, who was also Presiding Elder of the Richmond District, the Reverend J. Wayman Henry, and the Reverend S. W. Williams, Sr., who was also a Presiding Elder in the Baltimore Conference; and

WHEREAS, in August 1967, members of Saint Paul A.M.E. Church voted to purchase what had been Chestnut Avenue United Methodist Church, led by Brothers Carrol E. Pope and Smith Beckett, and the church moved to what is its present location at 2500 Chestnut Avenue in March 1970; and

WHEREAS, for the next three decades the church continued to prosper with an icon in African Methodism, the Reverend Sidney Wesley Williams, Jr., at the helm; new ministries were added to the church, such as the Wednesday Bread Program, and annual events such as the Citizen of the Year dinner, the Fellowship Dinner, the Church Homecoming celebration, and the formal Church Anniversary; and

WHEREAS, with the elevation of the Reverend Sidney W. Williams to Presiding Elder of the Portsmouth-Richmond-Roanoke District of the Virginia Conference, the church was blessed with the leadership of the Reverend Godfrey R. Patterson, the Reverend Franklin J. West, and the Reverend Donald F. White; the Reverend Dr. Oretha P. Cross, a spirit-filled, dynamic leader, was appointed as the first female pastor in the church's history in May 2016; and

WHEREAS, Saint Paul A.M.E. Church has a unique legacy as the only black A.M.E. church in the City of Newport News, and it will be served well in the future by the fact that the church's mission has not wavered over its 130-year history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Newport News on celebrating the 130th anniversary of its founding in 2017; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Reverend Dr. Oretha P. Cross, pastor of Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for its enduring history and bright future serving the Newport News community.

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