

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 248

Commending the Fifth Street Baptist Church.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 4, 2020

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 7, 2020

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church, located on Third Avenue in Richmond, celebrates its 140th anniversary in 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church was organized in July 1880 by several African American members of First African Baptist Church, which had been founded in 1841 by freedmen and slaves, who were asked to plant a church family in the Jackson Ward/Navy Hill area of Richmond to serve the spiritual needs of the community; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church was first pastored by the Reverend Dr. Henry Haywood Mitchell from 1880 to 1882, and the church worshipped in the Odd Fellows Hall at 1417 East Franklin Street until the church's first site was purchased at the intersection of Fifth and Jackson Streets, and it has been subsequently blessed with five houses of worship; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church has been served by 11 visionary, nationally renowned pastors who have been recognized for their dedicated service to the congregation and community, considerable homiletical and hermeneutical acumen, stirring proclamation of the Gospel, compassionate pastoral gifts, extraordinary oratorical skills, excellent church administration and stewardship, respect by ecclesiastical groups, and outstanding leadership among cultural, social, and educational organizations; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church hosted the mass planning meeting to establish Virginia Union University in Richmond and organized the Women's Convention Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.; and

WHEREAS, noted for its leadership in the Civil Rights movement in Richmond and throughout the nation, the Fifth Street Baptist Church often hosted organizational and planning meetings for demonstrations, and several members of the congregation were part of the "Richmond 34," a student-led sit-in to desegregate lunch counters in downtown Richmond; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church has also received acclaim for its rich history of service, including the establishment of groundbreaking church ministries, support of evangelism through home and foreign missions, and community outreach projects, particularly in the Highland Park area, which has continued throughout the years; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, the Fifth Street Baptist Church experienced a split and three years later, on August 6, 1995, it installed as its 11th pastor the Reverend Franklin Todd Gray, who will celebrate his 25th anniversary as leader of the church in June 2020; and

WHEREAS, under Reverend Gray's exemplary leadership, the membership of the Fifth Street Baptist Church increased significantly, and the Bible study and summer programs experienced phenomenal growth in attendance; the church also began offering computer classes, a health clinic, and before-school and after-school programs; and

WHEREAS, through a collaboration with the City of Richmond, the Fifth Street Baptist Church initiated a Head Start program and education and training for its staff; it also developed a relationship with the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority to offer education, family support, health care, parental involvement activities, and mental health services; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church maintains partnerships with many other churches, local organizations, and professional groups, and dedicated its G.R.A.C.E. (God's Redemptive and Community Empowerment) Center to better serve the community; and

WHEREAS, with the outstanding leadership of its pastors and through its dynamic ministries, the Fifth Street Baptist Church has remained an integral part of the Richmond community; and

WHEREAS, the Fifth Street Baptist Church is "founded by faith and focused on family, through Worship, Word, and Work," and the congregation firmly believes that God has many great things still in store for the church; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Fifth Street Baptist Church on the occasion of its 140th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Reverend Franklin Todd Gray and the congregation of the Fifth Street Baptist Church as an expression of the General Assembly's best wishes for a long and fruitful ministry serving the citizens of Richmond and all people throughout Virginia and the United States.