

## 2021 SPECIAL SESSION II

ENROLLED

### HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 706

*Commending St. George's Episcopal Church.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, August 2, 2021

WHEREAS, for 300 years, St. George's Episcopal Church has provided spiritual leadership and generous community outreach to the residents of the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church, originally known as St. George's Parish, was established as a parish of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia by the General Assembly of Virginia in November 1720; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Parish was officially formed on May 1, 1721, and encompassed the entirety of the newly formed Spotsylvania County, which then included the modern Counties of Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock and parts of the modern Counties of Page, Rockingham, and Warren, making it the first European religious organization with a parish area beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains; and

WHEREAS, by 1725, the first St. George's Parish church locations, Rappahannock Church, Mattapony Church, and Germanna Church, were in use in Spotsylvania County; after the establishment of the Town of Fredericksburg in 1728, St. George's Parish began construction on its first building at the current site of St. George's Episcopal Church on the northeast corner of Princess Anne Street and George Street in 1732; and

WHEREAS, Augustine and Mary Ball Washington attended St. George's Episcopal Church beginning in the 1730s, and in 1743, the Reverend James Marye, Sr., began his instruction of George Washington and his siblings; Charles Washington and Fielding Lewis (brother and brother-in-law of George Washington) were members of the vestry at the church; and

WHEREAS, while visiting his mother, Mary Ball Washington, in the late 1780s, an adult George Washington attended St. George's Episcopal Church, attracting an overflow congregation, and Mary Ball Washington's funeral took place at the church in 1789; the bonds between St. George's Episcopal Church and the Washington family are exemplified by a stained glass window in the current church building depicting the family's coat of arms; and

WHEREAS, Colonel John Dandridge (George Washington's father-in-law) and William Paul (John Paul Jones' brother) are buried in the St. George's Episcopal Church cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Brigadier General Hugh Mercer and Brigadier General George Weedon, both heroes of the American Revolution, were members of St. George's Episcopal Church, and James Monroe and his family were members of the congregation during their residence in Fredericksburg from 1786 to 1789; and

WHEREAS, following the dissolution of the ties with the Church of England due to the American Revolution, St. George's Episcopal Church joined the new Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States in 1789; and

WHEREAS, in 1815, a second brick building was constructed on the present site of St. George's Episcopal Church, and in 1849, the third and current brick building was constructed; and

WHEREAS, on November 28, 1824, during his visit to Fredericksburg, Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette, attended a church service in his honor at St. George's Episcopal Church, at which the Reverend Edward C. McGuire noted, "May [God] especially regard with favour, and crown with blessings, the illustrious advocate and defender of man's equal rights, at whose feet this happy and grateful land delights to lay its tribute of profoundest gratitude and love"; and

WHEREAS, in 1851, the City of Fredericksburg installed its city clock in the St. George's Episcopal Church steeple and connected it to the church bell; the church building still forms a major element of Fredericksburg's iconic skyline; and

WHEREAS, during the Civil War, St. George's Episcopal Church served as a hospital for wounded troops in 1862 and 1864; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church has sought to serve the wider community throughout its history; from 1765 to 1770, the church operated the Bray School to educate enslaved children, a highly controversial activity in its time, and later organized the Male Charity School in 1795 and the Female Charity School in 1802; and

WHEREAS, the St. George's Benevolent Society of Fredericksburg was incorporated in 1874 to benefit the poor and to assist widows and orphans; in 1897, the women of the congregation helped spearhead a fundraising campaign for Mary Washington Hospital, Fredericksburg's first hospital; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, St. George's Episcopal Church hosted a community mourning service following

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the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and in 2013, the church hosted a special Episcopal Diocese of Virginia service of remembrance, celebration, and witness commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation's 150th anniversary and to atone for the participation of the diocese in the institutions of chattel slavery and Jim Crow, demonstrating its dedication to the holy mission of social justice and equity; and

WHEREAS, from 1985 to 2007, St. George's Episcopal Church actively formed organizations that continue to serve homeless people in the region, including Loisann's Hope House, Thurman Brisben Center, and Micah Ecumenical Ministries; in 2011, St. George's Episcopal Church established a sister church relationship with Notre Dame Church and School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and began an ongoing ministry relationship with the church and its students; in 2011, St. George's Episcopal Church opened The Table, an open market food pantry for anyone in need; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church's vestry declared worship open to people of all races and classes in 1878 but continued a system of segregation until 1955, when church services and parish membership were desegregated; in 1997, the church adopted a statement of welcome that, today, reads, "You are welcome at St. George's Church regardless of race, nationality, sexual orientation, gender expression, or tradition"; and

WHEREAS, the leadership of St. George's Episcopal Church has acknowledged that, through the establishment of Spotsylvania County and the parish, the Virginia colonial government violated the sovereignty of the indigenous people, including the Patawomeck, the Monacan, the Manahoac, the Pamunkey, the Mattaponi, and the Rappahannock tribes, who flourished there for thousands of years; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church has acknowledged that the 300-year history of its parish is intertwined with the history of colonialism and slavery in the United States and that enslaved Africans were brought against their will to the parish and held in multigenerational bondage by its parishioners and its ordained clergy; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church celebrates the resilience and contributions of these enslaved individuals and remembers and pays respect to their descendants; the church is committed to continue working with all of its neighbors toward justice, healing, equity, liberation, and building a strong sense of community; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register on June 21, 2018, and in the National Register of Historic Places on March 19, 2019; and

WHEREAS, St. George's Episcopal Church celebrated the 300th anniversary of the foundation of St. George's Parish on May 1, 2021; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That St. George's Episcopal Church hereby be commended on the occasion of its 300th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to St. George's Episcopal Church as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for the historical significance of the parish and its legacy of contributions to the community.