

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 852

By Pody

A RESOLUTION to recognize Williamson Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church on the occasion of its 170th anniversary.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in paying tribute to those venerable religious institutions and their congregations who, through their unflagging capacity for love, dedication of spirit, and faith in God, strive to enrich the lives of people in their communities; and

WHEREAS, the good people of Williamson Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church comprise one such estimable congregation; they are celebrating their church's 170th anniversary this year; and

WHEREAS, Williamson Chapel is one of the oldest African-American churches in Wilson County, its congregation having been organized sometime between 1840 and 1850 in the Needmore community; and

WHEREAS, after an acre of land was donated by the Mastman family for the purpose of building a place of worship, an African-American preacher named Richard Williamson assumed the responsibility for forming the church; and

WHEREAS, a log church building was built on the site, and the children of the congregation met at the building during the week to pursue their education; the church was named Williamson Chapel in honor of its founder; and

WHEREAS, some eight generations later, many of the present-day descendants of Richard Williamson and his wife, Chaney, continue to reside in the Needmore community; and

WHEREAS, since the time of its organization, Williamson Chapel CME Church has experienced numerous changes, not only in the lives and hearts of the members and pastors, but also in the church's structure itself; and

WHEREAS, the original log church was torn down in approximately 1896, and a frame building was built a few feet from the original building; and

WHEREAS, not much is known about the men who served as pastors at the church between 1886 and 1936; their number includes the Reverends A.J. Parker, A.H. Jenkins, D.R. Wiles, W.R. Potter, E. Wiley, and D.L. Wein; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend John H. Britton, Sr., served the Williamson Chapel congregation from 1936 until 1961, when he retired due to ill health; and

WHEREAS, under his astute leadership, the church organized the Pastor's Aide Board; new choir robes were bought for the newly organized choir; the church's exterior was renovated; and a choir room and a pastor's study were added; and

WHEREAS, those pastors who served following Reverend Britton's tenure at Williamson Chapel were the Reverends Clarence Bagwell, Frank Hudson, Wiley Hatchett, and Dr. Solomon N. Shannon; and

WHEREAS, Reverend George W. Coleman, a brilliant theologian, arrived at Williamson Chapel CME Church in August 1984; during his tenure, Williamson Chapel experienced great spiritual and physical growth, as new members were added to the roster and new literary texts and other resource materials for the church library were purchased, as was a new parsonage for the current and future pastors and their families; and

WHEREAS, following Pastor Coleman at Williamson Chapel were the Reverends Thomas R. Crosslin and Raymond Sommerville; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend Frederick L. Braddock, Sr., served as the church's pastor from 1989 to 1998; under his inspired leadership, the church experienced more growth, with a significant membership increase and new ministries being organized, including the male chorus,

missionary choir, and men's fellowship, along with a strong emphasis being placed on children and youth ministry; and

WHEREAS, from 1998 to 2012, the Reverend Woodrow W. Harris, Jr., served as the church's pastor; he and his family excelled as the first family of the church, leading by example and fostering growth and hope for the congregation's future, thus revitalizing its membership; seven members of Williamson Chapel were inspired to accept their call to the ministry during Reverend Harris's tenure; and

WHEREAS, the church prospered in the early years of the twenty-first century, and the congregation moved into a new sanctuary on December 18, 2005; the former sanctuary, which has been approved for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, was transformed into a multi-purpose facility; and

WHEREAS, Williamson Chapel's current pastor is the Reverend Dr. Lynn Hargrow, Sr.; appointed in July 2012, Reverend Hargrow has vigorously pursued his vision of training, educating, and developing a greater awareness and desire for spiritual growth and outreach among the congregation and making the church more purpose driven; and

WHEREAS, for 170 years, the congregation of Williamson Chapel has made prominent contributions to the civic, educational, and social fabric of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Williamson Chapel is truly one of the great religious institutions and catalysts for positive spiritual change in our State and nation, and the members of this exceptional congregation should be appropriately honored on this special occasion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we join in celebrating the 170th anniversary of Williamson Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, thank the good people of this historic congregation for their notable service to their Lord and the State of Tennessee, and wish them much continued success and happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to

the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.