

HOUSE RESOLUTION 300

By Eldridge

A RESOLUTION to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Historic First Baptist Church in Jackson.

WHEREAS, the churches of our nation have been an integral part of our history as a people and have had an unparalleled impact in forming and maintaining a stable and just society; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the members of this legislative body should recognize those venerable religious institutions and their congregations that, 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, one such dynamic and historic community of faith is that of Historic First Baptist Church, the members of which are celebrating the church's 150th anniversary this year; and

WHEREAS, the African-American members of the Baptist Church of Jackson, which was founded in 1837 and integrated in 1866, withdrew their membership in November 1867, and on April 22, 1868, they organized First Baptist Church, which has the distinction of being the first post-Civil War African-American Baptist church in Jackson; and

WHEREAS, founding members included Aaron Banks and Jeff Brown, church trustees who purchased land for the first building, located on Lancaster Street; the first pastor of Historic First Baptist Church was Reverend W.T. Webb, who, five years into his tenure, donated property for a new church building on Webb Street, named in his honor. He served the congregation nearly thirty-five years; and

WHEREAS, early pastors of the church include Reverends J. Haynes, J.W. Lester, W. Cowan, and L.H. Allen. Upon Pastor Allen's resignation, the congregation called Reverend J.H.

Taylor as its pastor; with an initial congregation of approximately thirteen members, Pastor Taylor was tasked with building up membership as well as moving the church into a new building, as the current facility had become dilapidated; and

WHEREAS, in 1922, a new stone edifice was completed, with seating capacity for 280-300; Pastor Taylor continued to serve the congregation well for twenty-five years, until the time of his death. Succeeding him was Reverend M.H. Ribbins, who accepted the call to the pastorate at Historic First Baptist Church in 1943; and

WHEREAS, under Pastor Ribbins's leadership, the congregation invested in war bonds, purchased a new church site at the corner of Tanyard and Institute streets, purchased a parsonage on Tanyard Street, and instituted Men's Day, Women's Day, and Young People's Day programs; when he left in 1945, he was succeeded by Reverend T.D. Howard; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Howard instituted a new building fund program and oversaw land exchange between the church and the City of Jackson, which desired the church's property as a site for a larger school; he served the congregation faithfully for seven years, after which Reverend S.H. Herring was called to the pastorate; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Herring, who came to the church in December 1953, was known for his powerful preaching; he helped rebuild the church spiritually and oversaw the City's purchase of church land once more, this time for the construction of a highway; and

WHEREAS, when Pastor Herring departed in 1955, he was replaced by one of Historic First Baptist Church's most outstanding leaders, Reverend W.G. Terry; under his leadership, the church purchased a site at 433 Madison Street, and on September 23, 1957, a ground-breaking ceremony was held for the new building, which was completed on March 8, 1959; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Terry was called to a new pastorate in 1960, and in January 1961, the church called Reverend J.M. Cunningham to lead; he would serve astutely until 1966, at which time Reverend Dennis Epting assumed the pastorate at Historic First Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, much progress was made during the tenure of Pastor Epting; the total indebtedness of both the old parsonage and the church was liquidated, and a new parsonage was erected at 421 Madison Street; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Pastor Epting was replaced by Reverend W.C. Morrison, who served for nine years and made many upgrades and improvements to the church; Reverend John Paul Jones accepted the invitation to lead the church on February 18, 1985; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Jones served for more than twenty-five fruitful years, during which time the congregation saw the advent of the Children's Hour program; the establishment of several committees, including the Board of Christian Education, Church Workers Council, Historical Committee, Public Relations Committee, Mission and Evangelism Committee, and African Relief Committee; and the erection of a new fellowship hall; and

WHEREAS, during this time, Historic First Baptist Church selected four women to serve as trustees—Mabel Davis, Lerline Brooks, Ernestine McKinney, and Vera Brooks—and sponsored a scholarship fund, walk-a-thons, health fairs, and revivals; and

WHEREAS, after Pastor Jones's departure, the church's current pastor, Reverend William L. Watson, became pastor, delivering his first sermon on October 7, 2011; under his guidance, the church has experienced significant growth, adding 262 members, establishing Bible Study on Wednesdays, upgrading and installing media equipment, receiving tax-exempt status, and seeing great success from many departments, including Children in Action, Community Fun Day, New Members' Ministry, and College and Young Adults; and

WHEREAS, under Pastor Watson's leadership, Historic First Baptist Church continues to be a light in the community, and the devout members of the congregation faithfully strive to carry out God's work in the world; and

WHEREAS, as a powerful tool in the service of the Kingdom of God, Historic First Baptist Church of Jackson 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 for their exemplary service to their fellow Christians and to the good people of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we join in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Historic First Baptist Church of Jackson, thank the good

people of this historic congregation and their ministers 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.