



HR0322

LRB103 32329 ECR 61676 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of Representatives wish to recognize Bethel A.M.E. Church of Champaign on the occasion of its 160th anniversary; and

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WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church established itself as a center for spiritual development and cultural, educational, and political activities for the African American community of Champaign County in its quest for racial and social uplift and self-determination, separate from the oppression of Jim Crow laws that congregants experienced in the larger society; and

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WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's early members were largely part of the "first wave" of African Americans who migrated mainly from the South between 1860 and 1880, during the period before the Civil War through the Reconstruction era; and

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WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church was founded in 1863 by a small group of people who met for prayer in their homes; the church's first frame structure was built on a lot belonging to Mr. Jake Taylor at 405 E. Park Avenue for the cost of \$600.00 in 1864; and

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WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church moved and expanded in 1881, with the church's frame being moved to the lot originally

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1 purchased in 1877, which is the church's present location at  
2 Park Avenue and Fourth Street; during this period, the first  
3 parsonage was also built in the back of the church; and

4 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's membership reached 62 by  
5 1888; the church held a meeting to build a new structure and  
6 incorporate on October 5, 1892, and its corporate name became  
7 The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Champaign, Illinois;  
8 and

9 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's trustees were given  
10 authorization to mortgage Lot 53 upon which the new church was  
11 erected; under the leadership of Reverend Harry Lackey, church  
12 trustees secured payment on a loan of \$2,000 to the Citizen's  
13 Building Association of Urbana on August 23, 1892; and

14 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's new structure was  
15 completed and dedicated in January 1893, with its new brick  
16 building including beautiful colored-glass windows, an  
17 auditorium, a lecture room, a basement with a kitchen and a  
18 dining room, and an upstairs room, often called the Baraca  
19 room, which was used for many purposes, such as a library, a  
20 recreation room, and a choir room; and

21 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church established the National  
22 Baraca-Philathea Bible Study Group in 1910, becoming the only

1 congregation, Black or white, in the Champaign-Urbana area to  
2 do so, and the group continued from 1910 to 1940; and

3 WHEREAS, In 1925, Bethel A.M.E. Church member Mrs. Sarah  
4 Watson passed away, stating in her will that the proceeds of  
5 the sale of her property at 1010 West Main Street in Urbana  
6 were to be given to church trustees for the purpose of  
7 liquidating the church's mortgage indebtedness, thereby  
8 freeing the congregation of its mortgage; and

9 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church hosted the Illinois Annual  
10 Conference of the A.M.E. Church in 1897, 1922, and 1936; the  
11 church and its Sunday school also hosted Sunday school  
12 conventions; during the early part of the century, when  
13 segregation was at its peak, the church maintained a park on  
14 Ells Street for neighborhood children; and

15 WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's membership reached 270 by  
16 1938, which occurred during the first Great Migration; women  
17 from the church's Helping Hand Club began fundraising for a  
18 new church building in 1948; and

19 WHEREAS, Under the direction of Reverend Taborn, Bethel  
20 A.M.E. Church established a building committee in 1957, and  
21 the committee was later expanded to study the cost of  
22 renovating the old church or building a new structure; and

1           WHEREAS, With its rich musical tradition, Bethel A.M.E.  
2 Church has had a choir since 1893; the church's first choir  
3 robes were purchased for \$4.00 each in 1917; its choir was well  
4 organized by 1922, with a complete set of officers and various  
5 committees who all worked together to make the Bethel A.M.E.  
6 Choir the finest in the community and the district; and

7           WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church's Young Adult Choir,  
8 consisting of 25 voices under the direction of Ms. Shirley  
9 Hursey, purchased an electric organ in 1971 from the proceeds  
10 the choir earned from selling its Gospel record My Faith; and

11           WHEREAS, Bethel A.M.E. Church formed a new group called  
12 the Bethel Biblical Arts Players to perform dramatic  
13 productions in 1983, which was sponsored by private donations;  
14 the church group's first performance depicted the first  
15 "freedom march" and was conducted at the Annual Founder's Day  
16 Church Banquet in February 1986, with subsequent performances  
17 being held at the church's Family Thanksgiving Dinner and the  
18 1990 Kwanzaa Celebration; therefore, be it

19           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE  
20 HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
21 we recognize Bethel A.M.E. Church on its 160th anniversary as  
22 a spiritual, social, cultural, and educational hub for the

1 members of the African American community, sustaining itself  
2 through the Civil War, the Reconstruction era, World Wars I  
3 and II, the Great Migration, the Great Depression, and the  
4 civil rights movement; and be it further

5       RESOLVED, That we recognize Bethel A.M.E. Church's  
6 continued commitment towards its faith and legacy, and its  
7 dedication to good works; and be it further

8       RESOLVED, That we commend the leadership of Pastor  
9 Terrance Thomas as he guides Bethel A.M.E. Church into the  
10 next generation.