

By: Senator(s) Walls, Simmons, Turner,
Butler, Dearing, Fillingane, Frazier,
Gollott, Harden, Horhn, Jackson (11th),
Jordan, Mettetal, Posey, Thomas, White,
Williamson

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 620

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING AND COMMENDING THE
2 AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION FOR HELPING
3 TO FORGE THE WAY TO CITIZENSHIP AND DIGNITY TO FORMER SLAVES AND
4 PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DECENT IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN THE STATE OF
5 MISSISSIPPI.

6 WHEREAS, the history of the African Methodist Episcopal
7 Church began in 1787 when a Society lead by Richard Allen and
8 Absalom Jones established an African congregation to resist the
9 enforcement of religious discrimination against African-Americans,
10 when officials at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in
11 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, pulled African-Americans off their
12 knees while praying. This church was born and grew out of the
13 struggle and the will to survive with dignity. The movement began
14 and grew during slavery against all odds and has thrived and
15 survives today nationally and in our state. In 1794 Bethel AME
16 ("Mother Bethel") was dedicated with Allen as Pastor. To
17 establish Bethel's independence, Allen, a former Delaware slave,
18 successfully sued in the Pennsylvania courts in 1807 and 1815 for
19 the right of his congregation to exist as an independent
20 institution, a new Wesleyan denomination, the African Methodist
21 Episcopal. Richard Allen became the first AME Bishop; and

22 WHEREAS, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is a
23 time-tested religious and civic institution, when all around us
24 many independent churches have grown which have no background in
25 the struggles and perseverance of the Black citizens and
26 contributions that the AME Church has unselfishly made to the
27 society as a whole; and

28 WHEREAS, many of the African-American leadership of the State
29 of Mississippi has come from the AME Church, including educators,
30 businessmen, professionals, political leaders, and ministers.
31 Hiram Revels, the first African-American United States Senator,
32 was a member of the Mississippi African Methodist Episcopal
33 Church, as was John R. Lynch (first African-American Congressman
34 from Mississippi) and I.T. Montgomery (only African-American
35 member of the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890), and
36 B.K. Bruce and many other Mississippi historical figures; and

37 WHEREAS, the African Methodist Episcopal Church in
38 Mississippi was organized in January 1864, in Vicksburg,
39 Mississippi, by the Reverend Page Tyler, a missionary from
40 Indiana, who named the church Bethel. The Reverend Dr. T.W.
41 Stringer, a freeman from Canada, was the first Pastor of Bethel;
42 he brought the AME Church discipline and a Masonic ritual and was
43 a political leader of the freemen under the Republican Party
44 standard. He established the T.W. Stringer Grand Lodge of
45 Freemasonry for the State of Mississippi in Vicksburg. Dr.
46 Stringer's monument stands in the Vicksburg Cemetery and he
47 remains an inspirational figure to the generations who reap the
48 reward of his untiring work; and

49 WHEREAS, Dr. Isaiah Thornton Montgomery was a founder of
50 Campbell College in Edwards, Mississippi, an institution of the
51 Mississippi A.M.E. Conference established for the religious,
52 intellectual and industrial development of African-American youth.
53 Dr. Montgomery was also the founder of Mound Bayou, Mississippi,
54 the first all African-American town in the United States. Dr.
55 Montgomery's humanitarian ideas were far in advance of his time,
56 and he was a controversial member of the Mississippi
57 Constitutional Convention of 1890 because of his views. He was a
58 tireless worker for his race, a fine statesman and a great
59 Christian leader and was mourned throughout the country at the
60 time of his death in 1924; and

61 WHEREAS, in 1891, African Methodism pushed across the
62 Atlantic Ocean into Liberia and Sierra Leone in and into South
63 Africa in 1896. By the 1990s, the AME included over 2,000,000
64 members, 8,000 ministers and 7,000 congregations in more than 30
65 nations in North and South America, Africa and Europe. Twenty
66 bishops and twelve general officers comprised the leadership of
67 the denomination; and

68 WHEREAS, the AME Church has been a forerunner of education
69 for and within the African-American Community and is also the
70 church that sponsored the first independent historical black
71 college in the United States, Wilberforce University in Ohio. It
72 also established other senior and junior colleges and theological
73 seminaries within the United States in the late 1800s and early
74 1900s: Campbell College (Jackson, Mississippi); Kittrell College
75 (Kittrell, North Carolina); Allen University (Columbia, South
76 Carolina); Edward Waters College (Jacksonville, Florida); Morris
77 Brown College (Atlanta, Georgia); Paul Quinn College (Dallas,
78 Texas); Shorter College (North Little Rock, Arkansas); Jackson
79 Theological Seminary; Payne Theological Seminary; and Turner
80 Theological Seminary; and

81 WHEREAS, the original African Methodist Episcopal Churches
82 founded in Mississippi in the late 1800s include the following:
83 Bethel in Vicksburg; Zion Chapel A.M.E. Church in Natchez; St.
84 Peter's A.M.E. Church in Port Gibson; St. Matthew's A.M.E. Church
85 in Greenville; Pearl Street A.M.E. Church in Jackson; Friendship
86 A.M.E. Church in Clarksdale; Turner Chapel A.M.E. Church in
87 Greenwood; St. James A.M.E. Church in Meridian; and Powell Chapel
88 in Grenada; and

89 WHEREAS, several current members of the Mississippi
90 Legislature and other state officials are members of the African
91 Methodist Episcopal Church: Senator Bennie Turner, Senator Willie
92 Simmons, Senator Johnnie Walls, Representative Willie Bailey,

93 Representative Ester Harrison, Representative Robert Johnson and
94 Chief Justice Leslie D. King; and

95 WHEREAS, the mission of the African Methodist Episcopal
96 Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical,
97 emotional and environmental needs of all people by spreading
98 Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. The mission has
99 evolved into a service to the needy through a continuing program
100 of administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals,
101 nursing homes, mental institutions, senior citizens' homes and
102 encouraging thrift and economic advancement; and

103 WHEREAS, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded
104 as a place of divine worship where people might find freedom from
105 religious repression. It was founded as a vivid lesson of the
106 Revolutionary War of 1776, fresh in the memories of the citizens
107 of the new nation, and it is with pride that we recognize the
108 historical mission of this great religious and civic institution
109 nationally and in the State of Mississippi:

110 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
111 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
112 we do hereby recognize and commend the African Methodist Episcopal
113 (A.M.E.) Church as an institution for helping to forge the way to
114 citizenship and dignity to former slaves and people of African
115 decent in the United States and the State of Mississippi, and
116 welcome the presiding Bishop of the Eighth District to Mississippi
117 on the occasion of the church's Midyear Convocation.

118 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
119 Bishop C. Garnett Henning of the Eighth District African Methodist
120 Episcopal Church and be made available to the Capitol Press Corps.