MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2007

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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