

July 29, 2010

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a storied institution of faith in the Third Congressional District. This year, Saint John's African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church is celebrating its 170th anniversary, and I would like to highlight some moments from the history of the church and its contribution to our community.

St. John's was organized in 1840 within the old Cumberland Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Norfolk. The land where the church now stands was purchased for just \$450 in 1848. The church disconnected from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1863 and was formally received into the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1864. Elder John M. Brown was the Church's first pastor.

The church grew rapidly. Additional land to erect a parsonage was bought in 1865, and the church was enlarged twice between 1868 and 1888. In 1888, the present church building on Bute Street was erected. St. John's exterior has stood nearly unchanged since then.

St. John's flourished in Norfolk during the turn of the century. The church was the first African-American congregation in Norfolk to install a pipe organ. The parsonage was completed, and in 1908 St. John's had reached such a level of prominence as to host the General Conference of the entire African Methodist Episcopal Church.

St. John's continued to grow in the early twentieth century. Its membership grew to over 1000, and two new churches grew from it. This rapid growth helped the church burn its mortgage after just 46 years in 1915. Along with its internal growth, St. John's was also active in the community. The church established the first African-American BoyScout Troop in Norfolk in 1930 and the first African-American Girl Scout Troop in 1935.

The growth of St. John's in the second half of the century mirrored our country's growth. The church building underwent a massive renovation in 1956. The church's growth helped it to pay off the mortgage of the parsonage, install air conditioning, and buy buses, pianos, organs and robes for new choirs.

Over the last 25 years, St. John's has continued to both grow and stay relevant in the community. The church has started many new ministries to address the needs of both its

members and its Downtown Norfolk neighborhood. An education building conceived earlier was finally built, and the church created a Social Service Outreach Program, the Hope Outreach Ministry, and the Medical and Wellness Ministry. In 1986, St. John's A.M.E. was registered as a Virginia Historic Landmark. St. John's has taken care to develop programs for the next generation of its members, recently revitalizing its Children's Choir, and establishing both a Nursery and Young Adult Choir.

St. John's has had numerous pastors over its history, and many members have left St. John's to enter the priesthood and to preside over congregations of their own. In addition to First Pastor Rev. Brown, a selected list of pastors includes: Rev. W.D. Cook; Rev. J.R. Johnson; Rev. Walter L. Hildebrand; Rev. A.R. Powell; Rev. Walter C. Davis; Rev. L.W. Knight, Sr.; Rev. Larry S. Hinton; and the current pastor, Rev. John D. Burton.

As St. John's gathers to celebrate this historic milestone, the church can truly remember its past, celebrate its present, and focus on the future knowing in the words of Rev. Burton that "Everything is going to be alright!" I would like to congratulate Rev. Burton and all of the members of Saint John's African Methodist Episcopal Church on the occasion of their 170th anniversary.