

September 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, the Fifth Street Baptist Church is celebrating its 130th anniversary, and I would like to highlight some moments from the history of the church and its contribution to our community.

Fifth Street was organized in 1880 and first worshiped in the old Odd Fellows Hall on East Franklin Street. The church acquired land for a sanctuary on Fifth Street in 1882, and became known as Fifth Street Baptist. The first pastor, Rev. Henry Haywood Mitchell, served for 2 years. Under the pastorate of Rev. A.P. Dunbar, the new house of worship was completed and dedicated in 1886.

Fifth Street grew rapidly under the leadership of its third pastor, Rev. Wesley Paul Graham. At the end of one revival, Rev. Graham singlehandedly baptized 285 people in one afternoon. It was under his direction that the first Baptist Young Peoples Union in Virginia was established at Fifth Baptist. This Union was influential in the plans to consolidate Richmond Theological Seminary and Wayland Seminary of Washington, DC into one institution--Virginia Union University. Rev. Graham served Fifth Baptist for 17 years, with the highlight of his pastorate being the 1900 Session of the National Baptist Convention hosted at Fifth Street Baptist.

Fifth Street flourished in Richmond during the turn of the century. Under the leadership of its fourth pastor, Rev. Thomas J. King, the first Deaconess board in the city was organized, and hundreds of new members were added to the church. It was also during Rev. King's ministry, on July 4, 1926, that a new sanctuary was dedicated at 705 North Fifth Street.

The Great Depression brought with it a share of challenges for Fifth Baptist. In response, the church called a pastor who had already built a church in Philadelphia and was proven as a skilled leader. On the first Sunday in February, 1930, Rev. Christopher Columbus Scott became the fifth pastor of Fifth Street Baptist Church, and he served the church for 36 years. During his years of service, the church celebrated the burning of its mortgage in 1946, installed a new 22 rank pipe organ in 1955, and led the city-wide celebration of Emancipation Day for many years, bringing nationally known speakers and rallies for civil rights to the church.

Changes in the city of Richmond brought changes to Fifth Baptist under the leadership of its sixth pastor, Rev. Henry Clayton Gregory III, who assumed leadership of the church in August

1967. New expressway construction and other municipal developments had geographically split the Jackson Ward/Navy Hill community. In response, the church rededicated its efforts to the community, serving as a command post for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's March and establishing a Federal Credit Union for members. Fifth Baptist also looked to serve the world at large, building a medical clinic in Karnal, India.

In January 1974, Rev. Roscoe Dennis Cooper, Jr. was installed as the seventh pastor of Fifth Baptist. It was under his leadership that the church undertook the biggest change in its history. Citing growing problems with the location in Downtown Richmond, the church took the bold step to move 37 blocks away to a new property on Third Avenue. On Sunday, October 5, 1975, the church members marched these blocks to the church's new home in the Highland Park Community.

The church's eleventh and current pastor is Rev. F. Todd Gray. At the church's new location and under his leadership, Fifth Street has continued to minister to the needs of the community. Coming together with community neighbors, the church helped found the North District Community Development Corporation. Under this organization, the church, in conjunction with the Southern Tip Civic Association, The United Way, St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church, and other community groups, has provided numerous programs to the community including: computer training, test prep, job training, summer jobs for youth, and medical services. In 2005, the church dedicated a new Community Empowerment Center known as the G.R.A.C.E., God's Redemptive And Community Empowerment, Center.

As Fifth Street gathers to celebrate this historic milestone, the church can truly remember its past, celebrate its present, and focus on the future continuing to "bring the Kingdom to the Community!" I would like to congratulate current pastor Rev. Gray and all of the members of the Fifth Street Baptist Church on the occasion of their 130th anniversary.