

RESOLUTION NUMBER 337
195th Anniversary of First Baptist Church of St. Louis

WHEREAS, we have been apprised that First Baptist Church of St. Louis will be celebrating its 195th Anniversary; and

WHEREAS, First Baptist Church traces its origin to the First African Baptist Church, organized in 1817. First African Baptist Church was the first Protestant congregation established for African Americans in St. Louis. All of the city's Black Baptist churches developed from it. The church grew out of Sunday school and religious services organized in 1817 by two Baptist missionaries: Reverend John Mason Peck (1789-1876) and Reverend James Welch; and

WHEREAS, John Berry Meachum (1789-1854), a former slave who bought freedom for himself and his family, assisted Peck with the school and religious services. In 1822, African-American worshippers formed a separate branch of the church under the direction of Meachum, then a layman. In 1825, after he was ordained a minister, Meachum founded the First African Baptist Church and became its first pastor. A brick church building was erected at the same address in 1827. Membership then numbered about 220, of whom 200 were slaves; and

WHEREAS, shortly after the church was built, Meachum and Peck opened a day school at the church under the guise of a Sunday school. This undercover operation, called "Candle Tallow School," charged a monthly tuition of one dollar for those who could afford to pay. No one, including slaves, was ever turned away; and

WHEREAS, Meachum also owned a barrel factory and steamboats, one of which was equipped with a library. Between 1826 and 1836, Meachum purchased approximately twenty slaves. He employed them in his factory until they earned a trade and saved enough money to buy their freedom. He remained pastor of First African Baptist Church until his death in 1854. He is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, First African Baptist Church, now First Baptist Church, moved to fourteenth and Clark streets in 1848, and in 1917 to its present address at Bell Avenue. The church later purchased the adjacent four family flat and converted it into an educational building. The church was burned to the ground in 1940 and was reconstructed on the same site within thirteen months; and

WHEREAS, the pastor, Rev. Henry L. Midgett, received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Mechanical Engineering from North Carolina A&T State University. After accepting his calling to preach the gospel, he attended the Carolina University of Theology, where he received his Associates and Bachelor of Arts Degrees in Biblical Studies. Rev. Midgett has served as a board member of many community and civic organizations including: United Way of the Piedmont Advisory Board, Salvation Army Advisory Board, Habitat for Humanity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and Toastmasters International.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Aldermen of the City of St. Louis that we pause in our deliberations to recognize First Baptist Church of St. Louis on their 195th Anniversary and thank them for their innumerable contributions to the City of St. Louis in the community and we further direct the Clerk of this Board to spread a copy of this Resolution across the minutes of these proceedings and to prepare a commemorative copy to the end that it may be presented to our honorees at a time and place deemed appropriate by the Sponsor.

Introduced on the 23rd day of March, 2012 by:

Honorable Marlene Davis, Alderman 19th Ward

Adopted this the 23rd day of March, 2012 as attested by:

David W. Sweeney
Clerk, Board of Aldermen

Lewis E. Reed
President, Board of Aldermen