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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 103

Offered January 30, 2026

Commending Saint Martin's Parish.

Patrons—Fowler, Clark, Cole, J.G., Rasoul and Ware; Senators: Cifers and McDougle

WHEREAS, for 300 years, Saint Martin's Parish has played a central role in community life in Hanover County, offering opportunities for joyful worship to parishioners and generous outreach to all local residents; and

WHEREAS, Saint Martin's Parish traces its origins to 1726, when members of the Slash Church in Ashland decided to create a new church community closer to their homes in western Hanover County; and

WHEREAS, Saint Martin's Parish was formed from part of Saint Paul's Parish and included the Chapel in the Forks, a 20-foot by 36-foot wooden structure located between the North Anna River and the South Anna River that served as the mother church of the new parish; and

WHEREAS, as Saint Martin's Parish grew, the community saw the need for a larger church building, and a new Fork Church was completed at some point between 1735 and 1740; the historic, one-story, gable-roofed brick structure has been in continuous use since that time and stands as an elegant example of Anglican architecture and Colonial-era churches; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend William Swift served as the first minister of Saint Martin's Parish and guided the early development of the church community; at the time, many functions now ascribed to local governments, from surveying property lines to clearing and maintaining roads, were performed by members of parish vestries; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the American Revolution and independence from the British Crown, the Anglican Church was disestablished in Virginia in 1786, and Episcopal congregations such as Saint Martin's Parish saw a sharp decline in membership; and

WHEREAS, in 1825, the Reverend John Cooke galvanized the Saint Martin's Parish community through his energetic leadership; he oversaw repairs to Fork Church, opened Trinity Church, and initiated a new period of growth that lasted throughout the 19th century; and

WHEREAS, in 1840, Saint Martin's Parish purchased 101 acres of land adjacent to Fork Church, then constructed a parsonage later that year, and in 1855, the parish commissioned a church organ from renowned French builder Henry F. Berger; the Fork Church organ remains one of only two examples of Berger's work left in existence; and

WHEREAS, Fork Church underwent significant renovations in 1913, and the church has since installed modern amenities while maintaining its historical character; the church was added to the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 1970; and

WHEREAS, the Fork Church Cemetery is also an important historical resource, with intact gravestones dating back to 1754; the cemetery serves as the final resting place for Thomas Nelson, Jr., one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and American soldiers from the Revolutionary War to modern conflicts; and

WHEREAS, there have been many notable members of Saint Martin's Parish over the years, including the Reverend Sewell Stavely Hepburn, grandfather of actress Katharine Hepburn, who served as rector beginning in 1893; and

WHEREAS, Saint Martin's Parish has played an important role in preserving the history and heritage of the nation and remains a central pillar of local life in the Hanover County community, serving as a beacon of faith and fellowship for the community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Saint Martin's Parish on the occasion of its 300th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Fork Church as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the storied history of Saint Martin's Parish and its legacy of contributions to the region.

INTRODUCED

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