

RECOGNITION LETTERS

Presented to South Presbyterian Church on the Occasion of its 175th Anniversary



SEPTEMBER 23, 2023



Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition

PRESENTED TO

South Presbyterian Church

It is the practice of this member of the U.S. House of Representatives to take note of and publicly acknowledge those exemplary organizations whose purposeful mission and distinguished services have been committed to making meaningful and impactful contributions to the people of New York's 25th District.

Attendant to such concern and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Member of the U.S. House of Representatives is justly proud to recognize and honor South Presbyterian Church for one hundred and seventy five years of service in our community.

Now, therefore I, Representative Joseph D. Morelle, do hereby honor South Presbyterian Church on their 175th anniversary. I celebrate their contributions to the people of New York's 25th District, and recognize the work they continue to do.

Given, Under My Hand and the Seal of the U.S. House of Representatives on this 26th day of September, Two Thousand and Twenty-Three



Joseph D. Morelle

Joseph D. Morelle, Member of Congress
25th District, New York State

Proclamation

Office of The Monroe County Executive, Adam J. Bello

WHEREAS, In 1849, parents in the suburb of West Brighton spurred by the increasing frequency of their children's misbehavior identified a need for a Sunday School, and so the South Presbyterian Church was founded. Congregants met every Sunday afternoon in a one-room, red brick schoolhouse, where William B. Levet lead the youth program; and

WHEREAS, After nearly 50 years of teaching Sunday School at this location, the schoolhouse group voted to construct a church building, named The West Brighton Chapel Society. Construction began in 1899 as Rochester was growing into a bustling city, and by 1920, the name changed to West Brighton Presbyterian Church, and again in 1924 to South Presbyterian Church. Over the years, various church activities were added including youth groups, the young people's society, junior choir, senior quartet, a Boy Scout troupe, vacation Bible school, and adult Bible study; and

WHEREAS, Even during the challenges and diminishing income of the Great Depression, church membership continued to grow, adding three choirs and a Girl Scout troupe. By the late 1930s, the church hosted two services every Sunday morning in order to accommodate all worshipers and Sunday School membership neared 200, with an almost equal amount of adult enrollment; and

WHEREAS, A growing church required another building expansion, completed in 1953 with the ability to accommodate more than 500 worshipers, and the church continued its investment in its music program. By the mid-80s, the church honoring their commitment to inclusion added physical accessibility accommodations as well as hearing loops in the sanctuary and social hall; and

WHEREAS, The new century continued the rich heritage of building community through education, the arts and social engagement. In 2015, South Presbyterian Church merged with New Life Presbyterian Church, and over the next three years, the two groups thoughtfully and compassionately blended their congregations into one; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic brought on challenges, but the community seamlessly adopted a digital presence through online Bible studies, evening prayer, social gatherings, book groups, hymn signs, daily meditations and weekly worship; and

WHEREAS, The historic cultural past of South Presbyterian Church is still embraced through worship, service and song. Today, we celebrate 175 successful years of South Presbyterian Church and thank them for continued investments and dedication to their congregants and Monroe County.

Now therefore, I, Adam J. Bello, Monroe County Executive, do hereby proclaim

September 23, 2023 to be a day to honor and celebrate:

SOUTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 175TH ANNIVERSARY

In Monroe County and call upon every resident to celebrate this landmark anniversary.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam Bello".

Adam J. Bello

County Executive

Monroe County, New York State

Signed on Saturday this Twenty-Third Day of September in the year Two Thousand and Twenty-Three



HARRY B. BRONSON
Assemblymember
138th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Committee on Economic
Development, Job Creation,
Commerce and Industry

COMMITTEES
Education
Labor
Steering
Rules
Ways and Means

September 23, 2023

Reverend Deborah Fae Swift, Pastor
South Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 22782
Rochester, New York 14692

Dear Pastor Deb and Congregation,

Congratulations to you and your faithful members on reaching your 175th anniversary of South Presbyterian Church. This extraordinary milestone conveys your steadfast service and constant outpour of love dedicated to the Rochester community.

South Presbyterian Church has been an example of the guiding light of faith ever since its inception in 1849 when a Sunday School was formed to curb the teenagers of Brighton from "engaging in mischief" to now, where the church is operating unconventionally and redefining worship to reach as many people as possible in this technological age.

Your acts have not gone unnoticed. Whether it be your grassroots efforts to eradicate poverty and systemic racism or providing daily meditations to your congregation during the COVID lockdowns when people needed mental clarity most, your legacy has undoubtedly left a positive mark on this community that can never be removed.

Again, congratulations on this historic achievement. Keep being the Good Samaritan and a purveyor of hope and prosperity in the years to come; you are indeed an inspiration to us all.

Warmest Regards,

Harry B. Bronson
Member of Assembly



City of Rochester

City Hall Room 308A, 30 Church Street
Rochester, New York 14614-1290
www.cityofrochester.gov

Malik D. Evans
Mayor

September 23, 2023

The Reverend Deborah Fae Swift, Pastor
South Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 22782
Rochester, NY 14692

Re: 175th Anniversary Celebration

Dear Pastor Swift and Congregation:



It is with great pleasure that I congratulate you and your congregation on reaching a remarkable milestone—the 175th anniversary of South Presbyterian Church. This achievement stands as a testament to your enduring faith, unwavering dedication, and profound impact on the Rochester community.

South Presbyterian Church has been a shining example of faith in action, from your humble beginnings as a Sunday School in 1849 to the vibrant, progressive missional community you are today. Your legacy of serving the needs of your neighbors, fostering community through education and the arts, and embracing a "missional" ethos has left an indelible mark on our city.

As you celebrate this significant moment, may you draw inspiration from your rich history and find renewed purpose in continuing to positively impact the world. Your Acts of Faith Model of Ministry, vibrant online presence, and dedication to grassroots communities redefine what it means to be a church in the modern age.

Warmest congratulations on this historic occasion. May you remain a beacon of hope, love, and justice for many more years to come.

Sincerely,

Malik D. Evans
Mayor

[For the South Presbyterian Church 175th Anniversary Celebration]

September 18, 2023

Dear Friends in Christ:

I regret that I cannot be there with you on the auspicious occasion of the 175th Anniversary Celebration.

Reflecting on the work we did together throughout my tenure as the Presbytery Leader of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley has taken me back to *so many meetings* – primarily with the sessions of SPC and New Life, as each tackled the big questions of Who Are We? What Are We Here For? Who Is Our Neighbor?, in light of the changing nature of each community and the larger community. It was faithful, painstaking, sometimes pain-full, and often exhilarating work.

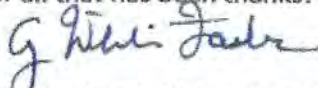
I came to you with experience as the former Pastor of the Irving Park Presbyterian Church in Chicago, and as presbytery staff for congregational transformation in three different presbyteries. Certainly, learnings from those places earned me a little wisdom. As I said when I was interviewed, "I know as much as anyone in the country about what doesn't work." And something about what does. Most importantly, I came with the hope of engaging in faithful experimentation wrapped in prayerful discernment. I adopted the method of the importunate widow – keep on asking for what God is calling you to.

In my line of work, I heard often that the chief role of any institution is to say No to new ideas. I was determined to keep questions open long enough to get past the automatic "we don't do it that way," to allow the Holy Spirit some room for action. Questions such as "What if?" and "Why not?" need some time and some air to emerge. I am grateful that you were willing to work in this way. You put it so well in your prayer, "Put us where you want us and show us what to do."

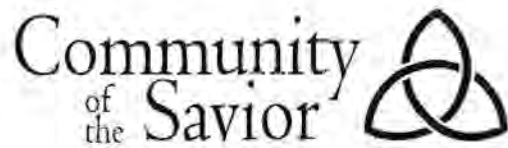
Most of all, I hope you felt my encouragement, for these ministries have required real courage, particularly at the beginning. I fielded more than a few questions and comments on your behalf by saying (as I still believe) that there is more than one way of being church in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley. And if there isn't the Presbytery is in trouble. I am grateful that the Presbytery voted its approval along the way. Who could imagine how many persons have been touched by the Acts of Faith and the teaching ministry of FireBird Spirit?

I remember many phone conversations and meetings with Pastor Deb, which were mind-expanding – sometimes perplexing, never boring. I give thanks for the way she and you connected to the Synod and to the ministries of the General Assembly and sister presbyteries, giving and receiving the knowledge of experience and the joy of Jesus Christ (and even some financial support). Ray Jones, I am grateful that you are present for this celebration on behalf of the wider church.

We, of course, wait faithfully for God's future for you to unfold.
For all that has been thanks! For all that will be, yes!



The Rev. Amy Williams Fowler
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Honorably Retired



September 19, 2023

The Rev. Deborah Fae Swift, Pastor
South Presbyterian Church
PO Box 22782
Rochester, NY 14692

Dear Pastor Deb,

What a joy to write on this blessed double anniversary occasion! On behalf of my colleagues, Pastor Barb Isaman-Bushart and Pastor Katie Sawade Hall, and the whole congregation of Community the Savior, it is a privilege to extend our heartfelt congratulations for South Presbyterian Church's ten years of faithful, creative, and missional engagement through your Acts of Faith Model of Ministry and the 175th anniversary of SPC's presence in the city of Rochester.

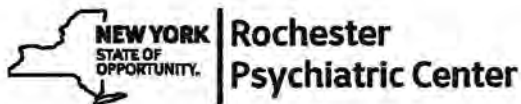
We remember with overwhelming gratitude those days in late 2013 when our paths first crossed. You and the people of the SPC were already well on your way in fleshing out the main contours of your bold Acts of Faith Ministry Model of Ministry and you were courageously preparing to lead *the church out of the building!* But you remained committed to stewarding the building and property for the purposes of justice and caring ministry to the neighborhood and surrounding area. When CoS received and responded to your carefully-crafted Request for Proposal, we wondered whether there would be any chance that a small, recently-launched congregation might be selected to serve as the next stewards of SPC's lovely Mount Hope/College Town property. Yet, our proposal not only received a hearing, but genuine interest and intrigue from the people of SPC. That gracious reception led not only to the eventual purchase of the property, but also to the making of new friends and colleagues in ministry – friendships that have stood the test of time and remain to this very day. In you, Pastor Deb, and in the key representatives of SPC – Mary Lee, Nancy, John, Kevin, and many others – we were showered with the presence of Christ and the deep goodness of humanity.

Congratulations these extraordinary milestones. And, most of all, thank you, Pastor Deb and the people of SPC, for your courageous and caring servanthood on behalf of all people – and, least of all, for us, your friends and colleagues in ministry at Community of the Savior.

With deep gratitude,

Douglas R. Cullum
Co-pastor, Community of the Savior.

4 E. Henrietta Road
Rochester, NY 14620



KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

ANN MARIE T. SULLIVAN, M.D.
Commissioner

PHILIP GRIFFIN
Executive Director

Pastor Deb
The Reverend Deborah Fae Swift, Pastor



P.O. Box 22782 | Rochester, NY 14692

September 18th, 2023

Dear Reverend Deborah Fae Swift,

It is my pleasure to share with you and the Recognition Reception attendees, the words and thoughts expressed by Sister Elaine Hollis, Chaplain, Amy Kheyfits, Director of Operations and myself on the truly remarkable work that occurred between you, the dedicated volunteer group and the Rochester Psychiatric Center (RPC). This endeavor was truly ground-breaking and unprecedented. As a group, we were the first in NYS and the first OMH facility serving forensic patients to have dedicated volunteers create a new worship community within a Forensic Unit!

For several years and until Covid struck and changed our ability to welcome people into the facility, Pastor Deb and her volunteers from the church provided needed and welcomed services on a regular basis both on the Adult Services Unit (ASU) side of the building and the Rochester Forensic Unit (RFU) side. Her musical ability to play almost anything on the piano added to the joy people felt as they participated in these services. Every week that she came, there was a program which participants could keep for further reflection. When the volunteer group was no longer able to come into the building, the Church provided DVD's that could be used with our folks for their spiritual enrichment. For a long time after Pastor Deb and her committed group of volunteers stopped coming to the facility due to Covid, numerous patients and staff would ask when they were going to return since they had found the services so meaningful and enriching. All of the volunteers who came so faithfully made it a point to get to know our folks and to engage in individual conversations with them. Their work was truly a blessing and has made a lasting impact on our patients, staff and facility!

Sincerely,

Philip Griffin, MPA, Executive Director

A FACILITY OF THE OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH



BRICKSTONE | FOUNDATION | HOME | MEADOWS

September 23, 2023

Dear Members and Friends of South Presbyterian Church,

Although we regret that we are not able to join you in person this afternoon, we are truly delighted to celebrate 175 years of your ministry and mission.

Your history tells a remarkable story of adaptability. You have embraced change as your membership fluctuated and you continue that legacy by venturing beyond the confines of a church building. We are grateful that your journey brought you to St. John's. South Presbyterian Church, without a physical building, and St. John's, with usable space, forged a relationship filled with possibilities. This partnership serves as an inspiring example for congregations and senior living communities well beyond our immediate vicinity.

Your presence at St. John's has been deeply appreciated. Through the various Acts of Faith hosted at St. John's, you have provided our residents with additional worship, study, and support. Over the years, many of our residents have found a spiritual home with you and some members of SPC have chosen to reside with us. Life at St. John's has become richer and more vibrant because of our partnership.

As we approach 2024, we will also commemorate a decade of our shared stewardship—maintaining both a physical and spiritual space for our members to come together.

We make a strong team and we eagerly anticipate the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Tony Zaccaglino
Vice President of Senior Housing

Reverend Sarah Culp
Director of Spiritual Care

Embrace Living

150 Highland Avenue | Rochester, New York | 14620-3099 | 585-760-1300

stjohnsliving.org