

BY: Senator COMRIE

COMMEMORATING the 30th Anniversary of the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center on July 29, 2017

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize that the quality and character of life in the communities across New York State are reflective of the concerned and dedicated efforts of those organizations and individuals who would devote themselves to the welfare of the community and its citizenry; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center to be celebrated at a reception at the St. Albans Congregational Church in St. Albans, New York; and

WHEREAS, In addition, this auspicious milestone will be celebrated with a myriad of events throughout the year; prior to the reception, Mari-Yan Pringle, Classical Soloist, will present a concert as part of the Church's 2017 Cultural Enrichment Series; and

WHEREAS, The finest concert band in the New York Metropolitan area, the Band of Long Island which performs concerts throughout Long Island, and assists not-for-profit organizations, performed on May 21, 2017, in celebration of this milestone; and

WHEREAS, The corner of Linden Boulevard and Marne Place in St. Albans, New York, is both a monument to and model of what Christians working together in unity and harmony can achieve; the dramatic and beautiful St. Albans Congregational Church is connected by a passageway to the modern, Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center (RRJFLC); and

WHEREAS, Since its opening in 1987, the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center has served as an invaluable resource for internal church and community outreach programs; and

WHEREAS, Founding Pastor, Reverend Robert Ross Johnson, a native of Spokane, Washington, earned his Master of Divinity degree from Colgate-Rochester; as minister of the Nazarene Congregational Church in Brooklyn, he learned there was a need for a Sunday School for local children; and

WHEREAS, In the beginning, meetings were attended by as few as 10 interested persons; undeterred, Reverend Robert Ross Johnson had a vision and a commitment; when the New York City Congregational Church Association acknowledged the need for a community-centered fellowship, the Addisleigh Park section was decided to be the most productive location for a new Congregational Church; and

WHEREAS, In 1954, worship services were held in the Merrick Community Center, and in 1955, at the Linden Theater for more than two

years; the church was officially incorporated in 1956, with a membership of 120 people; and

WHEREAS, The Church School consisted of 94 children, a choir, a youth program and scout troops; groundbreaking for the church building was held in 1958, and it was completed one year later; and

WHEREAS, Led by its pastor, the church became very visible during the Civil Rights struggles of the turbulent 1960s, and served as a center for education and information on the issues; and

WHEREAS, During this time, the Church became a community center of sorts; Girl and Boy Scouts, the Addisleigh Civic Association, tutorial programs, Sunday Black Cultural Programs and, in 1966, the Head Start Program, all met or held events in this limited space; and

WHEREAS, Before long, there were many discussions concerning the building of a multi-purpose building adjacent to the church; through the building fund project, the Family Life Center opened in March of 1987; the modern, multi-million dollar addition to the church and community offered a diversified array of services for youth and adults, and it provided a large assembly space for cultural, educational, civic and social use; and

WHEREAS, By 1990, various program services were greatly expanded, largely accomplishing the church's vision and goal of "Service to God and Community"; and

WHEREAS, After Reverend Robert Ross Johnson's retirement, Reverend Henry T. Simmons was called to serve as Senior Minister of the Church; a native of High Point, North Carolina, he received his undergraduate degree from North Carolina Central University, and the Master of Divinity Degree from Howard University; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Henry T. Simmons' broad background, experience, phenomenal energy and effective leadership elevated the church to new heights; known for his captivating preaching, and his dynamic, powerful sermons, the sanctuary would fill to beyond capacity at each worship service; and

WHEREAS, To accommodate the crowds, a second Sunday morning worship service was added just months after Reverend Henry T. Simmons arrived; his masterful teaching increased interest, attendance and commitment to adult Bible study; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Henry T. Simmons' "Nine Point Vision" for the church included the need for more space to house growing ministries and programs; the RRJ Family Life Center was expanded in 2003, to include a third floor; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Henry T. Simmons' vision has also given rise to a growing, faith-driven church, where membership has grown, and ministries have increased to serve members and the community; and

WHEREAS, Through active ministries and groups, Reverend Henry T.

Simmons was instrumental in implementing exciting new initiatives and services supporting outreach and church needs such as the Enriching Our Elders Ministry, and Because We Care Food Pantry; he also established the Saturday Jazz Communion Vespers each month; and

WHEREAS, The Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center of the St. Albans Congregational Church is a veritable home for so many organizations, causes, community events, celebrations, meetings, public forums, empowering seminars, and collective advocacy and is a blessed and wonderful institution we are justly proud of; and

WHEREAS, The Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center stands on the threshold of tomorrow, prepared to meet the challenges of the coming decades while retaining that spiritual resolve which characterizes its past; and

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to take note of enduring religious institutions and to bring such institutions to the attention of the people of this Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center on July 29, 2017; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Reverend Henry T. Simmons, St. Albans Congregational Church.