



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

RESOLUTION NO. 220695

Introduced September 15, 2022

Councilmember Bass

RESOLUTION

Also naming the 2000 - 2100 blocks of Lehigh Avenue as “Pastor Benjamin Smith, Sr. Drive” in honor of the late Pastor Benjamin Smith, Sr., to commemorate his forty-one years of vibrant preaching at Deliverance Evangelistic Church, and the economic revitalization of Lehigh Avenue that occurred under his leadership.

WHEREAS, Pastor Benjamin Smith was born in Halifax, North Carolina in April of 1914 and later migrated to Philadelphia where he became a noted Bible teacher and speaker; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Smith established the Deliverance Evangelistic Church in late 1961 at a facility located at the corner of North 25th and Jefferson Streets, having grown from a ten-member home-based prayer group earlier in the year; and

WHEREAS, The attendance of the congregants grew tremendously later compelling Pastor Smith and the church to secure an even larger facility at 22nd Street and Columbia Ave where the emphasis and efforts of the members were directed towards street evangelism; and

WHEREAS, In 1963, Pastor Smith’s dynamic preaching, and winning souls necessitated the relocation of the congregation again. They moved to a vacant theater with seating capacity of 900, located at 3540 N. 17th Street. Due to extensive outreach, by 1973 the congregation had outgrown that location; and

WHEREAS, In May of 1973, Pastor Smith again moved the congregation to the former Logan Theater, a much larger facility with a seating capacity of 3,000 and equipped with several closed-circuit TV rooms that further accommodated the growing membership. The church remained at this location for 19 years establishing over 60 departments and ministries to address education, leadership training, Christian and personal development, community engagement, etc. for all believers; and

WHEREAS, Being a forward thinking and a visionary churchman, Pastor Smith, based God’s direction, made the decision to identify a location that would be large enough to accommodate

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both existing and future membership which would finally address the continued growth of his congregation and limited space they were experiencing. After a search of sites in North Philadelphia, the former Connie Mack stadium grounds were chosen as it could easily house both a new edifice, and a retail shopping center that would provide economic development and employment opportunities for the surrounding community; and

WHEREAS, After Deliverance's Hope Plaza, an 80,000-square-foot mall which was the first phase of the plan, opened in 1986, Pastor Smith then began a capital campaign which culminated in the construction of a \$17 million, 165,000-square-foot facility; and

WHEREAS, Deliverance Evangelistic Church's new home, which opened on August 20, 1992, was at the time, the East Coast's largest megachurch featuring a massive 5,100-seat, light-filled, column-free sanctuary, complete with a Bible study complex, library, day care center, was more than a building. It was proof positive that an inner-city church, under the leadership of a dynamic and spiritual Pastor, can spearhead a neighborhood's economic rebirth; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Smith, a devout man who was known to pray for two hours each day and fasted once a week, stated that his successes were steeped in the Bible, saying "Jesus has a plan, and the Bible shows the way." His "holistic ministry," was based on the principle that holiness must join with pragmatism to tackle need and distress of the community; and

WHEREAS, Though Pastor Benjamin Smith Sr. went home to be with the Lord in March 2002, his vision continues to bless the North Philadelphia community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the dedicated service of late Pastor Benjamin Smith, Sr, to the Deliverance Evangelistic Church and the North Philadelphia community, is honored and the 2000-2100 Blocks of Lehigh Avenue shall henceforth also be known as "Pastor Benjamin Smith, Sr. Drive".

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the Deliverance Church Family as evidence of the sincere respect and appreciation of this legislative body.