

# **Council President Andrew Friedson Shares Remarks at the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Scotland AME Zion Church**

**Monday, Oct. 14, 2024**—Montgomery County Council President Andrew Friedson provided the following remarks at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Scotland AME Zion Church.

***Council President Friedson's complete remarks can be read below.***

We stand here today on a century of history. A hundred years of blessings. A hundred years of burdens. This is a critical moment – for this church and this community...and for our community, our county, and our country.

In July 2019, as we all know, the historic Scotland AME Zion Church flooded, figuratively and literally. Flooded by the storms of nature and by the stranglehold of institutional racism. There is so much symbolism in water. Beyond its religious significance for Christians in baptism and for Jews with the mikveh, water represents spiritual renewal. It is a basic element of life. We don't create the rain. It comes down upon us. Channeled in the right way, rain creates and sustains life. But directed in the wrong way, it causes destruction. It can be "liquid sunshine" as Rev. Huggins described it at the groundbreaking, or it can become sheer devastation.

Make no mistake: this church didn't flood because of rain – in the summer of 2019 or in the countless storms before that. It flooded because of how the rain was channeled. Not by chance, but by choice. By human action, not by natural causes. Decisions to realign Seven Locks Road and to diminish a community that once stood 500 acres strong with that humble church in the center, to a single street with a church across the way, that would now bear the impacts of every single one of those decisions. The rain – which for decades had sustained the land founded by William Dove in 1880 and the generations that followed – would go from a blessing to an insurmountable burden.

My friends, we can't control the rain. Just as we cannot control our history. But what we can do, what we *must* do, is to come together to channel it. To acknowledge it. To understand it. To appreciate it. To do what the great Marylander Frederick Douglass instructed us, "to do with the past *only* as we can make it useful to the present and the future."

Today we are here to celebrate. Not all the burdens that this community has taken on over the decades. But all the blessings. The way they have risen up at each generation since the founding of what was then Snakes Den to ensure their community's survival. The Doves, the Masons, the Crawfords, the Thompsons, the Simms, and all the legacy families who provided the land, established and grew this community, and built the church with their bare hands. And we're here to acknowledge that in key moments throughout the past century, certain extraordinary community leaders stepped up to help. Those of different faiths but with a shared sense of purpose. People like Joyce Siegel with Save our Scotland. Like the interfaith community, especially the Jewish community, who were inspired by Dr. King, and after watching Rabbi

Abraham Joshua Heschel march together with him in the struggle for civil rights, brought back those lessons and put their faith to action here in Montgomery County.

That same interfaith coalition has come together once again at this defining moment with leaders like Mitch and Emily Rales and Glenstone. To ensure that this church – which was the physical center of this community -- remains its spiritual center. A symbol of resilience against all odds. Justice delayed, but justice that could not – and will not – be denied.

We can't tell the truth, we can't reconcile that truth, unless we safeguard the structures that are part of the history, that tell the story of who we are and how we got here. Even the parts we aren't so proud of.

I've said before that if those walls could talk, they would tell our story. Not just Scotland's story, but our county's story. Our country's story. My story and your story.

A community that had been submerged by outside forces, is now being lifted up with the help of outside forces. A county as committed today to providing help in the same measure as far too many had previously committed to causing harm. An interfaith coalition dedicated on channeling the rain to sustain this church for the next 100 years. A community devoted to erecting a new structure behind the historic church to change the message, so it's no longer that "we're turning our back on you." Instead, the message from the broader community to the Scotland community is now: "We've got your back."

Together, with the inspiration of Dr. King still resonating and the legacy of the founding families still radiating, we can ensure that no one passes by that little white church on Seven Locks Road and doesn't know what it means, what it represents, and who made it happen.

None of us can do everything. But every single one of us can do something. That's why we're today. To honor the last 100 years – the remarkably resilient Scotland community that withstood every obstacle imaginable – and to look ahead to the second century.

To carry the torch from the past. To pass it off to the future. To channel the rain for good.

So that this historic church with humble beginnings has anything but a humble future.

My friends, let's finish the work and let's do it together. Here's to Scotland's Second Century!

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