



NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Lee Harris, Mayor

Vasco A. Smith, Jr., Administration Building
11th Floor, 160 North Main, Memphis, Tennessee 38103

MEDIA ADVISORY

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**HISTORICAL BLACK CHURCH THAT HOSTED U.S. PRESIDENTS AND HOUSED
IDA B. WELLS' OFFICE TO RECEIVE \$150,000 IN SUPPORT FOR PRESERVATION
FROM SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

***Shelby County leaders will gather to announce the support to repair the historic Beale Street
Baptist Church.***

- WHO:** Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris, Shelby County Commission Chairman Mickell M. Lowery, Register of Deeds Willie Brooks, Community Faith Leaders, Memphis Heritage, Inc., and Self & Tucker Architects
- WHAT:** Shelby County Government historic preservation announcement and tour of Beale Street Baptist Church
- WHEN:** Friday, October 28, 2022, at 9:55 a.m.
- WHERE:** Beale Street Baptist Church, 379 Beale St., Memphis, TN 38103

Shelby County, TN – On Friday, October 28, 2022, Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris, along with Shelby County elected officials, community faith leaders, and those involved in the Beale Street Baptist Church restoration, will celebrate securing \$150,000 for the critical restorations of the landmark building. The church was the first built in Memphis for African American parishioners,

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and one of the first Black churches built in the South. Construction of the church standing now started in 1869, and the church's origins can be traced back to 1840.

The investment to fund this historic preservation project was approved in June 2022 by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners. Former Shelby County Commission Chairman, and now Shelby County Register of Deeds, Willie Brooks, led the efforts while on the Board of Commissioners to help fund improvements and ADA requirements.

The support will fund repairs to the roof, façade, and architectural restoration to the gothic-inspired building. The landmark lauded, 'The Mother of Black Churches,' was also once the site of civil rights pioneer and journalist Ida B. Wells' office and the newspaper she edited, *The Memphis Free Speech*. The church has been visited by two U.S. presidents, Ulysses S. Grant, and Theodore Roosevelt.

The event will include a tour of the church and remarks about the historic restoration project.

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris: "Beale Street Baptist Church has been a place of peace, community, and service for generations of Shelby County residents. This restoration project will ensure this historic landmark can continue to be just that for generations to come. Thank you to all involved in the work to preserve our history."

Shelby County Register of Deeds Willie Brooks: "Beale Street Baptist Church has called one of the most famous streets in the world home for more than 100 years. We want to ensure it has many more years ahead of it, and I'm proud to be a part of securing funds to make sure that happens."

Shelby County Commission Chairman Mickell Lowery: "Shelby County has a rich history, and Beale Street Baptist Church has been a part of that history for over 180 years. The walls of the church tell the stories of all those who came before us, and this restoration project will help tell the stories of those who will come after. I'm proud of the work the Shelby County Board of Commissioners has put into preserving this history."

Pastor David E. Helton, Beale Street Baptist Church Pastor: "Beale Street Baptist Church is still a thriving house of worship. It's also a stopping point for many Memphis visitors who want to see one of the oldest Black churches in the United States. I'm thrilled and thankful the church will continue to welcome visitors for years to come."

Rev. Dr. L. LaSimba M. Gray, Pastor New Sardis Baptist Church: Beale Street Baptist Church has worn many hats in its more than 180-year history. It has served as a peaceful sanctuary for



some and the helm of the battle for civil rights for others. For all of us it's a piece of Memphis history that deserves this needed restoration.”

(End of Release)

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