

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9:01AM, MONDAY, February 24, 2025

**National Trust for Historic Preservation Grant Provides \$250,000
to Help Protect Iconic Soapstone Baptist Church in Pickens, County SC**

Pumpkintown, SC -- February 24, 2025: The National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund today announced that the Soapstone Preservation Endowment (SPE/Endowment) has been selected from among 622 applications nationwide to receive a 2025 grant. The \$250,000 award goes to "support growing a perpetual endowment to protect & promote Soapstone Baptist Church's buildings & grounds."

Brent Leggs, Executive Director, African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund & Senior Vice President, National Trust for Historic Preservation said, "I am pleased (Soapstone Baptist Church) is one of 30 historic Black churches to receive this inaugural grant award. The work you are doing to preserve your historic Black church and tell the full American story is energizing and inspiring."

Carlton Owen, Chairman of SPE noted that the nonprofit was established in June 2022 to amass a perpetual fund to protect the history and legacy of the Liberia Community and its centerpiece, Soapstone Baptist Church. "When we began our work, few believed that we could ever achieve an audacious \$1 million goal. Yet, in less than three years and with the benefit of this generous award we stand within sight of the finish line. We have faith that God will continue to bless this important work as we seek to obtain the remaining \$200,000 needed to forever protect and promote this special place in South Carolina history," he said.

To date SPE has raised more than \$250,000 from foundations, individuals, and businesses that through the sponsorship and support of Rep. Davd Hiott (R), Pickens, and Rep. Chandra Dillard (D), Greenville, was matched dollar-for-dollar by the State of South Carolina in recognition of the site's historic importance and tourism value to the county, state, and region.

Soapstone's matriarch, Mable Owens Clarke whose great-grandparents were emancipated slaves that bought and gave the site to the community that today boast the church, one-room school, a "slave cemetery," and soapstone rock outcrops used by the Cherokee for centuries as the source material for cooking implements. "I stand amazed by God's blessings of this tiny church. We are deeply moved and humbled by the recognition granted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation," said Clarke.

Those wishing to help fill the gap in funding may do so by sending checks to SPE, PO Box 454, Marietta, SC 29661 or via online donations at soapstonepe.org. Owen said the endowment is seeking 60 businesses, churches, or individuals/families who will join 40 others that accepted the "Partnership Challenge" of becoming "1-of-100" giving tax deductible gifts of \$3000 one-time or \$1000/year over three years. "We faithfully believe we will reach our goal in 2025 the 160th anniversary of the establishment of the Liberia Community and Soapstone Baptist Church," Owen said.