

Whereas the Rev. William D. Robeson faithfully served the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church as their pastor for 21 years beginning in 1878 in a ministry that was lauded by members of the congregation, the wider community, and the Presbytery of New Brunswick,

and whereas his accomplishments included faithful gospel proclamation and pastoral care, seeking the financial support of the Presbytery of New Brunswick to insure the congregation's existence, improving the church's property, serving the larger church and building historic relationships between African American Presbyterian churches and leaving a legacy that defines him as "ever the defender of justice—standing firm for the rights of all persons" and describes him as one who "was unwilling to compromise on moral principles"<sup>i</sup>

and whereas the minutes indicate that a commission of the Presbytery of New Brunswick voted to dismiss the Rev. Robeson on September 24, 1900 over the objections of a vast majority of the congregation and their pastor and one of the four reasons listed was "a general unrest and dissatisfaction on the part of others –meaning Residents of Princeton- who have been the Church's friends and helpers"<sup>ii</sup> which is a clear reference to the white community in Princeton

and whereas church historians who work with ecclesiastical records affirm that what is not said is often more revealing than what is said and that official minutes are intentionally vague and often avoid embarrassing information and that therefore a reasonable, informed interpretation of the commission's actions lead to the conclusion that the Rev. Robeson was dismissed for working for the rights of African Americans and preaching a message of social justice that threatened and offended the white majority in Princeton while the history records that the African American community filled the Witherspoon Street Church to overflowing to listen to and thank the Rev. Robeson on his last Sunday in the pulpit

and whereas the Presbytery of New Brunswick dismissal of the Rev. Robeson led to a financial hardship for him and for his family that has been documented in the records of the town of Princeton, the Witherspoon St. Presbyterian Church, and the Presbytery of New Brunswick

Therefore, be it resolved that the Presbytery of New Brunswick on this night of September 8, 2015 expresses its regret over the dismissal of the Rev William D. Robeson from the Witherspoon St Presbyterian Church and hereby apologies to the Pastor and Session of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church and its members and the family of the Rev. Robeson for the hurt and hardship caused by the action.

Furthermore, the members of the Presbytery of New Brunswick seek permission from the Witherspoon St Presbyterian Church to have this resolution read at the congregation's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in November and sincerely request that the Presbyterian institutions in Princeton and Presbytery of New Brunswick commit to an ongoing process of racial reconciliation in response to present circumstances in our nation and in light of the complex history of Princeton when it comes to race.

Lastly, the Presbytery of New Brunswick offers this resolution in gratitude for all who have worked to preserve and correct and proclaim the history of the Witherspoon Presbyterian Church to the glory of God through the years and in honor of the memory of the Rev. William D. Robeson for his faithful service and the Rev. David Prince who made this resolution a priority and a goal of his in the last year of his life.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1988.

<sup>ii</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, June 20, 1900-April 10, 1901