

NASSAU AND WITHERSPOON STREET  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

# Partners in Faith: *Our Journey Together*



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October 8, 2023

1:30 pm



# EVENT SCHEDULE

Welcome

David A. Davis  
Pastor, Nassau Presbyterian Church

Comments

Jonathan Lee Walton  
President, Princeton Theological Seminary

*Telling Our Stories*

Video by Bob Meola

The 250th Celebration

Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church

Tracy Eskridge

The Graphic Timeline

Terry McEwen  
Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church

Closing

Barbara Flythe  
Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church

Following the event, join us in the Assembly Room for refreshments, conversation and a chance to view the timeline.

# INTRODUCTION

Separated by less than half a mile, the First Presbyterian Church (now Nassau) and Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church have co-existed for almost two centuries. The chronicling of the nature of their relationship, of two churches, one black and one white, is what this project is about. It is both the story of evolving practices in two faith communities and the evolution of the American story in times of major social and political upheaval. The founders of First Presbyterian Church in pre-Revolutionary 1755 were white, patrician, patriots and owners of slaves. While the beginnings of Witherspoon Street Church in 1840, pre-dating the Civil War, had a congregant membership comprised of slaves, former slaves, and free colored men and women. The two churches were initially bound together by a cultural master-slave dynamic; but once separated, the black congregants of Witherspoon Street lived in post-slavery economic conditions, and the white congregants of the First Presbyterian Church reaped the benefits of a two-tiered political and economic system.

By the early 20th century, there was little evidence of a relationship or even communication between the two churches and their congregations. Paul Robeson, born in 1898, observed that,

*“The Princeton of my boyhood. . . . was for all of the world like any small town in the deep South. Less than 50 miles from New York and closer to Philadelphia, Princeton was spiritually in Dixie.”*

Like the small towns in the South, harsh segregation policies and severe institutionalized, embedded racism over-shadowed every aspect of the daily lives of the blacks living in the Princeton community. They lived in extreme slum-like poverty conditions: poor housing, limited education, working menial jobs, and little access to adequate medical care. It was “slavery by another name.”

continued on next page



Still, civic black leaders emerged from their own community to alter and enhance the quality of life for themselves and for their families, and by the 1920s had established a chapter of the NAACP, had created space for educational leaders in the Princeton Public Schools, and had become involved in local politics. During this period of justice seeking, neither the First Presbyterian Church nor its members were involved in these efforts. The members of the two churches, only blocks apart, both Presbyterian, lived basically in two separate worlds. Still after several years the ice began to thaw a little. “The Princeton Plan” for the integration of elementary public schools was established in 1948, six years before the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Decision of 1954. Change had started in the Princeton community!

**Partners in Faith: Our Journey Together**, by telling the stories and experiences and exploring the shared programs and events of the past 186 years, is offering a unique and nuanced look at the evolution and practice of the Presbyterian faith, in one of the oldest towns in America, through the multicolored lenses of our disparate communities. This is, in many ways, a chronicle of America’s evolution and how, hopefully, our Christian faith has tempered tension and distrust to allow us ultimately to work together for the benefit of our congregations and the wider Princeton community. Exploring and understanding just how this unique relationship came together and has continued for more than 183 years is an amazing story and one that needs to be told.

With admiration, appreciation and deep affection,  
Partners in Faith: Our Journey Together  
is dedicated to

## **David Hunter “Mac” McAlpin**

Pastor, Friend, Model and Mentor

January 19, 1928 — August 5, 2022

After graduating from Princeton and completing an MDiv degree at Union Theological Seminary in 1953, David McAlpin (Mac) was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1957 at Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church. With Witherspoon's senior pastor, the Rev. Benjamin J. Anderson, he attended the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963 and took King's lessons to heart. His lifelong efforts to forge a better world and a more just and desegregated society focused on providing housing to those in need and on prison reform. In the 1950s he led efforts to establish integrated housing developments in Princeton. In 1986 he was a founder of Habitat



for Humanity in the Trenton area, leading it for nearly 30 years. He also founded and was president of Capstone Corporation, a nonprofit, low-income housing developer serving Mercer County communities. He was an active supporter of the Paul Robeson House of Princeton. When the sessions of Nassau and Witherspoon approved the formation of a joint partnership in 2018, Mac was at the table. And, when Bending the Moral Arc: Courageous Conversations took shape in 2021, Mac was with us.

Mac's service to and attendance at Witherspoon Church spanned more than 65 years. Nassau Church also had a piece of his heart and he balanced regular worship in both sanctuaries, weaving the two congregations together by inspiring active involvement in the causes he supported and the activities in which he was involved. Mac's gift of intermingling the practical and the spiritual with warmth and good cheer are at the heart of what binds our congregations together today.

A combined service of celebration of Mac's life was held at Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church on October 8, 2022, one year ago today.

## A MEETINGHOUSE IS BUILT

Presbyterian worshipers in Princeton requested and received permission from the Presbytery of New Brunswick to build their first house of worship. Construction begins in 1762.

Presbyterians had been worshiping in Princeton prior to construction, usually with the Kingston or Lawrenceville Presbyterian churches. On May 28, 1755, the presbytery received a petition “to build a meeting house [in Princeton],” and to arrange a supply of preachers. When the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) moved to Princeton in 1756, presbyterians worshiped with faculty and students on the college’s campus. Negotiations with the college began in 1760, and in 1762, an agreement concerning land (where the current building still stands) was made and a loan toward construction was given by the college.

Early trustee records extant are from 1786, the date when the church was officially incorporated under New Jersey law; the session began to keep records in 1792 at the instruction of the presbytery.

It is believed that some White enslavers brought enslaved people with them to services from the start, but evidence of this begins only in 1792, where session minutes from November of 1792 count “53 communing members, including 5 blacks.”

Additional Black members are regularly recorded beginning in 1806 a through 1845 in both chronological rolls and the session minutes. The chronological roll identifies them only as “Col’d,” but until the 1830s, most of the subsequent Black members are marked in the Session Minutes variably, though minutes eventually began to refer to members in some instances as just “colored.”

In the completed sanctuary, it was the responsibility of the sexton to be sure that the “Coloured” members sat in their appointed area of the gallery [balcony], and to report any misbehavior.

The perspective of a few early session members on slavery may be revealed in these quotations:

The baptism of an early Black member is noted in the session minutes of September 9, 1810: “a black man of Mr. Elijah Blackwell – Benjamin – at his admission to the communion table”. Later minutes of June 28, 1812, refer again to “Benjamin, a man of colour, the slave of Mr. Elijah Blackwell, from whom he ran away, having been guilty of



conduct highly inconsistent with his standing as a member in full communion in this church was unanimously suspended.”

The cumulative church roll of 1816–1832 shows 572 white communicants and 64 Black communicants (listed separately; of the 36 in this list marked with designated status, 15 are marked as “slave”).

## **1816**

### **BETSEY STOCKTON ADMITTED TO COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP**

In 1816, Betsey Stockton, identified in session minutes as “a coloured woman living in the family of Rev’d. Dr. Green”, is admitted to communicant membership at First Presbyterian Church.

Betsey Stockton (1798?–1865) played a prominent role in the Black community in Princeton. She was known by her contemporaries as a gifted teacher that led a Sunday School for both scripture and literacy, and also taught in the first public school for Black children, opened in 1837.

Stockton was at one point an enslaved child of Dr. Ashbel Green, the president of Princeton University and president of the board of Princeton Seminary from 1812–1822. Stockton eventually became either a free woman or indentured servant, though record of how this happened is unclear.

She became well educated under the tutelage of Dr. Green’s family and Princeton Seminary students. Based on their enthusiastic letters of recommendation, she was accepted in 1822 as a missionary to the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). She was the first single woman and the first Black person to receive such an appointment. The missionary contract stated that she should be treated “neither as an equal nor as a servant, but as a humble Christian friend,” and that either she or the Stewarts were free to terminate the family relationship. In Hawaii, she participated fully in the creation of a bilingual school.

Betsey returned to the United States in 1828, and after working in upstate New York and Philadelphia in teaching roles, returned to Princeton in 1833, where she continued in teaching roles for many decades.

Her name appears in first in the list of Black members who petitioned the Presbytery to form the First Presbyterian Church of Colour in Princeton (later Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church [WSPC]), indicating her significant leadership.

A stained glass window in the current WSPC building commemorates her. She is also commemorated at Princeton Seminary by the Betsey Stockton Center for Black Studies.

**1835-36**

**CHURCH BUILDING BURNS, CONGREGANTS OF COLOR MEET SEPARATELY**

On July 6, 1835, the original worship building burns down, and the white congregants meet in the Princeton Seminary Chapel during construction of a new sanctuary. Members of color begin to meet separately in the Witherspoon Street area. White congregants begin to worship in their new sanctuary in 1836, with the gallery being completed in 1837.

Why did members of color meet separately? The Seminary's smaller chapel gallery (balcony) could seat only about sixty. Since college and seminary students had always been assigned gallery seats, the space would presumably have been too small to accommodate the more than sixty members of color.

It is probable that Black members sometimes worshipped with the Mt. Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal congregation that had been established in 1832 in the Witherspoon neighborhood, according to oral tradition provided by WSPC historian Shirley Satterfield. Private correspondence of the Rev. Dr. James Waddell Alexander refers to their gathering in "a little place of their own" in 1837 and later in a "house" where he preached to them in 1838.

After the new sanctuary was complete, some members of color desired to return to worship in the new building. However, James Waddell Alexander, in a letter dated November 17, 1837, gives insight into the view of White congregants: "We have a new and handsome edifice. While it was building, the negroes worshipped apart, in a little place of their own. The majority of the pew-holders wish them to remain as a separate congregation." (All pews in the nave were rented to members at varying prices, hence the term "pew-holders.") Alexander personally decries this situation, yet thinks it "unwise" for the Black members to "insist" on returning, where they would "take up about half the gallery." Alexander attributes the necessity of separation to the large proportion of Black people in the general Princeton community and the increasing "prejudice of the lower classes of whites against blacks" because of the abolition movement. It is reported that in 1837, Session appointed a committee to persuade Black members to continue meeting separately.



**1840**

**FIRST SEPARATE COMMUNION SERVICE HELD**

In 1840, a sanctuary is constructed on the current site of WSPC and is dedicated for use by members of color. The first separate communion service was held that year. Witherspoon Church tradition considers this the establishment of their church.

Earlier that year, white philanthropists financed the construction of the sanctuary, and First Presbyterian Church session minutes of September 4, 1840, record that Elder “J Lowrey in behalf of the Coloured people requested permission for the Session to have a separate communion in their own church.” Permission was granted, with the sacrament to be administered “on the second sabbath of this month.” Witherspoon Church traditionally regards this event as the founding of their congregation, although members of color were still technically members of First Presbyterian. The first communion service was likely celebrated by The Rev. James Waddell Alexander, who was the congregation’s first Stated Supply pastor. WSPC held its 100th anniversary celebration in 1940, and its 150th in 1990.

Membership records in First Church session Minutes and the Chronological Roll show that Black people continued to be admitted to communicant membership of First Church from late 1840 through early 1846, with a total of over 40 names added during those years. Presumably, all these persons were worshipping with the Witherspoon community.

In 1842, a committee of Black members was appointed (by the [white] Session, with no record of consultation on names of appointees) “to supervise the conduct of the coloured members.”

In 1844 and 1845, multiple meetings of Session were held at the “African church” or “Church of the Coloured People.”

**March 10, 1846**

**THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF COLOUR OF PRINCETON ESTABLISHED**

Ninety Black members of First Presbyterian Church were “dismissed” at their request to officially establish the new congregation. (NOTE: “Dismissed” was then and is still technical Presbyterian language for giving a member a formal recommendation of being in good standing when the person requests to move to a different congregation.)

At the February 2, 1846, meeting of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Horatio Scudder and Jeffry W. Hampton, “Commissioners from the society of Coloured people in Princeton,” presented a petition by 90 members to formally establish them as a separate congregation. The Presbytery approved the request and formed a committee led by Dr. Benjamin Rice, pastor of First Church, to organize the new church “at some time convenient before the next meeting of Presbytery.”

These ninety persons were “dismissed” by the Session. The minutes of Session meetings in the handwritten bound book covering this period skip over March 10, 1846, without mention. However, at the back of the bound book, handwritten on unnumbered pages, is a list of people of color on the First Presbyterian roll, with a written statement after the list that on March 10, 1846, “the Coloured members of this Church were dismissed to the number of ninety to form a church under the name of the First Presbyterian Church of Colour of Princeton.” These names are individually marked “dismissed” in the list.

At the April 28, 1846, meeting of Presbytery, the committee led by Dr. Rice reported that the church had been formed, and Presbytery “resolved that said church be received under care of the Presbytery. Horatio Scudder, an Elder from said church, thus took his seat as a member of Presbytery.” The name of the church was changed to Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church in 1848.

The First Presbyterian session minutes of April 26, 1846, include the Session’s Annual Report to the Presbytery. There it is noted that over the past year, 114 members had been dismissed to other churches. The minutes of that year, however, show only 21 names of persons dismissed, all white [unstated] to connect to various other churches. Remarkably, there is no mention of the formal organization of First Presbyterian Church of Colour of Princeton, nor dismissal of members to it, although the decline in membership from 461 to 368 over the past year (shown in the Report to Presbytery) likely reflects those dismissed to WSPC.

First Presbyterian’s annual reports to Presbytery from the beginning regularly give only a total membership number, without distinction by race. In 1851 and 1852, however, the reports specify “o Coloured communicants.”

*Researched and written by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (NPC)*

## **1901**

### **A BELOVED PASTOR LEAVES HIS CHURCH**

As a result of his efforts to end racism and Jim Crow laws in Princeton, white members of the Presbytery forced Pastor William Drew Robeson out of his position at Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church.

William Drew Robeson was born into slavery in 1844 in Martin County, North Carolina. In 1860, at age 15, he escaped through the Underground Railroad and made his way to Philadelphia. He was a “laborer” in the Union Army during the Civil War, and after the war, enrolled at Lincoln College in Pennsylvania. He earned an A.B. in 1873 and a Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1876.

He served as the minister of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey, from 1880 until 1901. During his time in WSPC’s pulpit, Rev. Robeson was beloved by his congregation and was known for his steadfast advocacy of civil and human rights for African Americans and the Princeton immigrant community. This activism angered many of the white citizens of Princeton and led to his ouster by the Presbytery of New Brunswick. In his farewell sermon of January 27, 1901, Robeson urged his congregation not to give in to bitterness or despair: “As I review the past, and think upon many scenes, my heart is full of love....Do not be discouraged, do not think your past work is in vain.”

*Researched and written by Shirley Satterfield (WSPC)*

## **1901-1921**

### **WOODROW WILSON: THE LONG, DARK SHADOW**

Woodrow Wilson’s tenure as president of both Princeton University and the United States was one of unprecedented regression in racial equality. His policies and actions while serving as president severely impeded the progress of African-Americans for years to come.

Woodrow Wilson was viewed by the Princeton community as a prominent scholar, internationalist, and devout Presbyterian. However, his actions and policies on race and racism severely tarnished this image.

Wilson was appointed president of Princeton University in 1901. It was a period in the United States when the Black community was just beginning to make steps forward in society, and part of this upward mobility was being admitted to and attending institutions of higher learning, including Princeton University. As president of the university, Wilson ordered that all evidence and records of Black students attending the University be erased, and that the institution refuse admittance to any who applied. These views were so embedded in the practices and policies of the institution, that Princeton University did not admit a single Black student until 1947, becoming the last of the Ivy League colleges to racially integrate.

Clearly, the shadow that Wilson cast and the racist culture he enforced was divisive in the Princeton community and most certainly impacted the relationships between two churches and the members of the congregations.

## **1954**

### **CHALLENGING SEGREGATED HOUSING PRACTICES IN PRINCETON**

Pastors from Witherspoon Street, First Church, and Second Church led a group of members of the three congregations and the community to create the Princeton Housing Group for the purpose of promoting integrated housing in the Princeton community.

In the 1950s, housing in the town of Princeton and the surrounding area was completely racially segregated. In 1954, a group of parishioners, with their clergy leaders, came together to establish the Princeton Housing Group to promote and provide integrated housing in the community. The seeds of this group grew out of meetings of men's groups from the three churches who came together regularly to discuss mutual problems related to race. They agreed that the entrenched segregated housing patterns of the town were a major problem. Taking their concerns to the three Presbyterian pastors in the community, they began to organize for change. Working quietly in white developments and communities, they conducted door-to-door canvassing to assess attitudes and feelings. The Princeton Housing Group (PHG) paved the way for several black families to buy into white neighborhoods and communities. The PHG has had many name changes through the years, and presently continues this important work as Princeton Community Housing.

**1958**

**GLEN ACRES DEVELOPMENT BRINGS MULTIRACIAL HOUSING TO PRINCETON**

Planned racially integrated housing was rare prior to the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. Members of three Presbyterian faith communities believed that it could happen in Princeton.

In 1956, the Princeton Housing Group invited Morris Milgrim, a builder who had constructed integrated housing in the Philadelphia area, to serve as a consultant in planning for integrated communities in Princeton.

The PHG raised \$65,000 and started planning for two integrated communities; Glen Acres on Alexander Road and another in the Mount Lucas Road/Ewing Street area. The work on the Glen Acres development began in 1954 and was completed and sold out by 1956. The development, styled in a horseshoe curve, contained 15 houses, and the racial mix was two white families to one Black. The homeowners quickly became a close-knit community of caring and supportive neighbors, where lasting friendships and relationships flourished. In the early days, there were several families with children, ranging in age from six months to adolescence. The children celebrated holidays, played together, and continue to be close friends, even as adults. One of the core values of the residents was to maintain the interracial integrity of the community. Over the years, with the help of supportive real estate brokers, the racial balance has remained stable.

**1973**

**WITHERSPOON STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH DOES NOT MERGE**

During the 19th century, there were several discussions of the need for the three Presbyterian churches in Princeton to merge into one stronger body. In 1973, Dr. Arthur Link, a member of First Church, wrote to session with a plan for the merger of the First Church and St. Andrews (formerly Second Presbyterian Church). There followed a contact with St. Andrews and, eventually, Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church was invited to join the merger committee to explore a plan for establishing a union of the three churches. The rationale for the merger, according to Dr. Link in an interview for the New York Times (“Two Churches Merge in Princeton” June 24, 1973), was that the churches “can conduct a proper ministry much better together...by pooling financial strength and resources for a diversity in ministerial staff, and the greater mobility of Christians for various tasks in society.” Subsequently, a vote was scheduled on March 18,



1973, for each of the three congregations to approve a preliminary plan for the merger. The members of Witherspoon Street opposed the merger by a vote of 83% against. First Church and St. Andrews members voted overwhelmingly to merge and become one body: Nassau Presbyterian Church.

## **1980**

### **A COMMUNITY NEED IS FULFILLED**

The Crisis Ministry of Princeton (now Arm in Arm) was a program created for the residents of the community experiencing hunger. It has developed into a “program where community comes together to assure that we all have the most basic needs of food and shelter, and, as possible, the livelihood to maintain them.”

“There are a lot of hungry people in Princeton and we have to feed them.” These are the words of Susie B. Waxwood as she spoke to the leadership of Nassau Presbyterian Church in 1980. Waxwood, an Elder of WSPC, was a respected community activist with a long history of advocacy in serving the poor in the Princeton community. When she spoke, people listened, and from these words the Crisis Ministry of Princeton was established. It was founded by Nassau Presbyterian Church and Trinity Episcopal Church of Princeton to help secure the basic needs of food and housing for people in the community. Since its founding, the program has expanded from a single Princeton site to include distribution centers in Trenton and Hamilton. In November 2016, the name was changed to “Arm in Arm” to reflect the belief that when partnering collaboratively with many sectors of the community, all thrive together. Using a tag line, “Better Together” and working with a staff of twenty and hundreds of volunteers, the program currently serves 5,000 families annually.

## **2005-2006**

### **PARTNERS IN FAITH: 250 YEARS OF PRESBYTERIANS IN PRINCETON**

Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church and Nassau Presbyterian Church joined in partnership to celebrate and recognize the 250 years presence of Presbyterians in Princeton with several programs, activities, and events in a true collaboration of a community of faith and fellowship.

By 2005, Presbyterians had been worshipping in Princeton for 250 years. Led by pastors Rev. Muriel Burrows and Rev. David A. Davis, a 250th Anniversary Steering



Committee was created to celebrate this milestone. Elder Ben Colbert (WSPC) and Elder Nancy Prince (NPC) were designated committee co-chairs. Members of both churches served on committees to plan a two-year series of programs and events to explore the shared history, deepen the local mission and renew the connections with one another. Their efforts resulted in informative historical lectures, shared worship and music programs, the building of a Habitat for Humanity House in Trenton, and the creating of four hand-sewn banners reflecting the life of and mission of the two churches.

The 250th anniversary was a seminal event in strengthening the connections between the two congregations and building lasting relationships and friendships. It was a transformative moment in our shared history.

## **2005**

### **110 WITHERSPOON STREET: A HOUSE WITH A LEGACY AND FUTURE IS PURCHASED**

The birthplace of Paul Robeson is purchased by the congregation of Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church. The future of the Paul Robeson House and the Robeson legacy is secured.

The Robeson house, former manse for the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, has been a focal point of the advancement of the African American community in the Princeton area for more than a century. Following the purchase of the house, a board of trustees was established to plan for the renovation of the property and to develop it as a center for the study of human rights and a testament to the Robeson family and legacy. Members from both congregations and interested citizens of the Princeton community serve on the Board of Trustees, and, for the past several years, the board has planned major events for fundraising, renovation, and promoting of the Paul Robeson legacy. Expanding on a strong development campaign, the receipt of significant grants from the Bunbury Fund and the Mellon Foundation (the latter to be shared with the West Philadelphia Cultural Collective) has enabled much needed renovation of the Robeson house to move forward.

## **2015**

### **AN APOLOGY LONG OVERDUE**

In November 2015, as acts of recompense, the Presbytery of New Brunswick formally apologizes to WSPC for its treatment of Pastor William Drew Robeson, in what has been called an “ecclesiastical lynching,” and the Synod of the Northeast retires the \$175,000 mortgage on the former manse at 110 Witherspoon Street.

In 2015, Elder Nancy Prince (NPC) and Rev. David Prince contacted the Presbyterian Historical Society to clarify the facts of the dismissal of Rev. Robeson from his pastorate of Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church in 1901. Her report of the shameful circumstances surrounding the dismissal and the serious harm inflicted on Rev. Robeson and his family led the leadership of the Synod of the Northeast to retire the \$175,000 mortgage on the former WSPC manse as recompense for the 1901 decision of the Presbytery of New Brunswick in forcing Rev. Robeson out of his church.

As an act of racial reconciliation the Presbytery of New Brunswick, at a stated meeting on September 8, 2015, approved the commissioners’ resolution regarding the Rev. William Robeson affair. Presented by the Rev. Dave Davis, pastor of NPC, and the Rev. John White, a former pastor of WSPC, the resolution states:

“...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 Street 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.

The resolution requests 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.

## **2019**

### **A PARTNERSHIP BECOMES OFFICIAL**

Building on the strong partnership resulting from years of working together, and the impact of the 250th Anniversary Celebration, the Session of each church approved an official partnership between the two congregations.

The Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church/Nassau Presbyterian Church Joint Committee was charged with: establishing a larger Presbyterian footprint in Princeton, growing and enriching the relationship between the two congregations, and building a church beyond the walls. The committee is composed of ten members, five from each congregation. NPC supported the partnership with funds allocated from a 2012 fundraising campaign. The committee has been meeting regularly since January 2019, and the two congregations have partnered for several programs and events. There have been book discussions, shared meals, worship opportunities, trips, pulpit exchanges, joint choir presentations, and intentional participation and support of special events at both churches. Working with community groups, the committee has sponsored a successful annual community-wide reading of the Frederick Douglass' speech, "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?"

## **2019**

### **CONGREGATIONS WORSHIP TOGETHER ON EASTER SUNDAY**

Two faith communities coming together in the early morning of Easter Sunday to worship has become a meaningful and sacred tradition for both congregations.

Seeing the sun rise, as the members of the two congregations are gathered to share a worship service at 6 a.m. on Easter morning, is a special experience. The well-attended service at the Princeton Cemetery on Witherspoon Street is brief and simple. During the call to worship, prayer, a sermon and music, a respectful silence and quiet is maintained by all.

The Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church has been worshipping in the early morning of Resurrection Sunday at the cemetery since the mid-1990s. It was at one of the first Witherspoon/Nassau Joint Committee meetings that WSPC members invited Nassau Church to participate in this special service. The invitation was accepted with enthusiasm. Following the service, a continental breakfast is served at Witherspoon, and then both congregations prepare for the main event — Easter morning worship at their respective churches.

2020

## COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS: BENDING THE MORAL ARC

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd is murdered by a Minneapolis policeman, and the seeds for Bending the Moral Arc: Courageous Conversations Project are planted.

On June 29, 2020, four members of the Witherspoon/Nassau Joint Committee, two from each congregation, launched the Bending the Moral Arc lay-led continuous conversations project to promote authentic, transformative cross racial/cultural dialogue. Two racially-mixed groups, with 10 to 12 participants in each, were organized for a monthly virtual meeting to discuss and explore their feelings, attitudes and experiences related to issues of race and racism in their personal lives and in the broader culture. Using multi-media current events for reference materials— newspaper/ magazine articles, books, YouTube presentations, Ted Talks, filmed documentaries, sermons, museum and library digital collections, music — homework assignments rotate among the group participants. Discussion topics are selected by co-leaders (one white and one Black) based on interest or concern. In expanding the mission of the Bending the Moral Arc (BMA) Project, some members have elected to promote BMA sponsored social justice outreach programs (i.e., reparations and mass incarceration reform) and have received two Innovative Grants from the Synod of the Northeast to further this effort.

*Researched and written by Barbara Flythe (WSPC)*

“The arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

-Theodore Parker, abolitionist, 1850

## Resource and Research Materials

Historical Society of Princeton

Nassau/First Presbyterian Church Documents and Records

Church Book, 1792–1822. Minutes of the Session, Synod of New Jersey Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS) Special Collections. Cited in 1755, 1840, 1846.

Chronological Roll, 1792–1877. PTS Special Collections. Cited in 1755.

First Presbyterian Church Session Minutes, 1822–1847. Cited in 1755, 1840, 1846.

Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)

Presbyterian Mission Agency

Minutes of the General Assembly

Presbyterian Historical Society

Presbytery of New Brunswick Minutes, Presbyterian Historical Society. Cited in 1846.

Princeton Theological Seminary Special Collections. Folders concerning the Seminary Chapel Steadman contract of April 5, 1837, describing work yet to be completed (original document).

Princeton University, The Princeton Slavery Project

Witherspoon-Jackson Historical Society

Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church Documents and Records

John A. Andrew III, “Betsey Stockton: Stranger in a Strange Land,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 52/2 (1974), pp. 157–166.

Ann Marie Davison Papers, 1814–1861. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Constance Escher, *She Calls Herself Betsy Stockton*. Resources Publication, 2022. Cited in 1816 (p. 15).

John H. Hall, ed. *Familiar Letters of James W. Alexander, D.D. Vol 1*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1860. Cited in 1835–1836 (pp. 260, 262).

Arthur S. Link, ed. *The First Presbyterian Church of Princeton: Two Centuries of History*. Princeton, First Presbyterian Church, 1967. Cited in 1755 (pp. 9, 11, 24, 33), 1835–1836 (pp. 34–36), 1840 (p. 35).

Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro: A History*. Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966.

Gregory Nobles, *The Education of Betsey Stockton*. University of Chicago Press, 2022.

William Yoo, *What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church*. Louisville: WJK, 2022.

“A Brief History of Presbyterians in Princeton,” *The Journey Continues: 250 Years Presbyterian Presence in Princeton, Witherspoon Street and Nassau Churches*, September 24, 2006.

The Atlantic Monthly Archive, *The Racist Legacy of Woodrow Wilson*, 11.2015 41749.

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# Partners in Faith: Our Journey Together

## History Project Purpose

- To celebrate and reckon with the history of two disparate Presbyterian congregations in Princeton, New Jersey.
- To educate the congregants of the churches and the broader community of the value of understanding the significance of our rich shared history and experiences.
- To consider and explore the many ways in which major historical, political and social events have impacted the relationships between the two churches.
- To explore the response of our Christian witness to shaping our journey together.

## Acknowledgements

To all of our Partners in Faith, thank you for your support, passion and caring for our joint history project. The joy of building relationships continues to grow as we work, plan and worship together. We have learned, in new ways, that history should be valued, respected and honored. We have come to understand that truth telling is not always easy, but can be cleansing.

### **Thank you to and thank you from:**

Karen Brown, Monica Burch, Benjamin Colbert, Tom Coogan, Patti Daley, Gerald Delk, Edie Estrada, Barbara Flythe, Lisa Flythe, Kevin Gift, Linda Gilmore, Holly Hardaway, Cecelia Hodges, Tracy Eskridge Joseph, Terry McEwen, Grace Kimbrough, James Mack, Lauren McFeaters, Bob Meola, Jim Moorhead, Nancy Prince, Kathie Sakenfeld, Shirley Satterfield, Michelle Selden, Azra Thomas, Bill Wakefield, Pam Wakefield, Noel Werner, Carol Wehrheim and Lauren Yeh.

And thank you for the many donations of photos, images, letters and documents from many sources, and, as always, the ongoing support of the staff of both churches.

Finally, a special thank you to Reverend David A. Davis, whose vision and spirit continue to light our way forward.