

RESOLUTION OF PRESBYTERY OF NORTHEAST NEW JERSEY TO COMMEMORATE THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

The Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), meeting in Westfield on November 15, 2025, resolves for its historic and current witness to:

1. **Commemorate** the vital role of the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Tradition in the American Revolution of 1775-83, including 12 Presbyterians and 13 Congregationalists among the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, representing the largest religious grouping within the 2.5 million inhabitants of the 13 colonies at that time;
2. **Invite** other New Jersey presbyteries and governing bodies of the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ to join with us in the following commemoration preparations and activities;
3. **Promote** the historic ministries of NJ congregations whose members and ministers supported the Revolution, including churches in the Elizabeth, Newark, Princeton, New Brunswick, and Trenton areas, and founding leaders including John Witherspoon, Samuel Davies, David Brainerd, Jonathan Dickinson, James & Hannah Caldwell, Gilbert Tennent, and comparable NJ supporters of the Revolution in Dutch Reformed and Congregational Churches identified by our full communion partners in the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ;
4. **Educate and advocate** for the enduring principles rooted in Reformed Christianity: reverence for God, the author of liberty and equality for all those created in God's image; self-government on a democratic and representative basis as we have in our churches; respect for individual conscience based in the Holy Spirit's ability to speak to all, thus giving all the right to speak and vote; accountable government and limits on the powers of any individual or interest on that government; a high view of public service opposed to corruption and self-enrichment; checks and balances on power based in a realistic understanding of human sin and self-interest; fair taxation; appropriate regulation; a covenantal view of reciprocal responsibilities; and a positive understanding of government to serve the common welfare and common defense, not just a "necessary evil;"
5. **Encourage** congregations and regional church bodies to consider the application of these principles in the current governmental practices of the United States, and to hold public informational events including elected officials, educators, and faith leaders;
6. **Support** the accurate researching and teaching of all aspects of our history, including—as honest patriots—the failures of our nation to live up to its ideals with regard to Native Americans, African-Americans, and various immigrant groups: Propaganda cannot be allowed to re-write history;
7. **Support** independent media sources and public libraries free of censorship, and **encourage** public reflection, art, acts of solidarity and worship to demonstrate ways our country may better reflect the Gospel image of a "city set on a hill."
8. **Authorize** a commission of the Presbytery to:
 - a. **invite** PNENJ and other Reformed congregations to participate in the commemoration conversation and engage in the activities above, researching and

publicizing their own Revolutionary period histories and reflecting on the principles involved and their current applications. This is in line with priorities 3 and 4 of the Presbytery of NENJ, to experiment with new expressions of being Church, and to use our collective voice for systemic change.

- b. **Develop** resources and events to celebrate and publicize the Christian and Reformed support for the American Revolution and the on-going importance of Reformed Christian ethical principles for representative democracy and “equal justice under law” (as on the Supreme Court building). Written and video contributions from congregations will be welcomed and posted as part of this project.
- c. **Coordinate** with the Presbyterian Historical Society and similarly concerned academic institutions (public and private) and scholars.
- d. **Engage** in conversation with other religious traditions and public institutions, including the State of New Jersey, RevolutionNJ (a joint effort of the NJ Historical Commission and Crossroads of the American Revolution), municipalities, and other historically-minded organizations.

Supporting statement:

A. A recent essay, “Religion and Republicanism in the American Revolution” by Michael W. McConnell, sums up the historical consensus about the application of Reformed theology and ethics in the struggle for independence:

“...Reformed Protestant clergy supported the Revolution almost unanimously. Many observers at the time credited (or blamed) Reformed Protestantism for the Revolution. Joseph Galloway, an early supporter of the American cause who later became a Tory and fled the country, wrote that the Revolution was caused by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, whose “principles of religion and polity [were] equally averse to those of the established Church and Government.”³⁵ Another Loyalist blamed the Revolution on the “black Regiment”—referring to the austere black robes worn by Calvinist ministers.³⁶ King George III reportedly called the Revolution a “Presbyterian Rebellion.”³⁷ See article for citations: <https://america250.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Religion-and-Republicanism-in-the-American-Revolution.pdf>

B. Many of our congregations’ histories describe the role of ministers and members during the Revolution. The purpose of this resolution is to prompt the remembrance of this history and to examine its lessons for the current day. In particular, we would note a part of the history of the “Mother Church” of many of our congregations, First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, now Siloam/Hope/First. This is the 313 Project, showing a substantial African-American presence based in that number of Black persons buried in their historic cemetery. Other histories, such as those of the Connecticut Farms (Union) and Springfield congregations, describe battles and the burning of church buildings. Parts of the College of New Jersey (precursor of Princeton Seminary and University) were also burned. This resolution encourages work with local, county, and state historical societies to provide a faithful understanding of patriotic motivation and hopes.

- C. A convenient reference to Reformed principles of governance can be found in “The Historic Principles of Church Order,” F-3.01ff, in The Book of Order, Part II of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The well-known phrase, “God alone is Lord of the conscience...” is contained in those principles.
- D. An unsystematic listing of resources is provided here to illustrate the depth of Reformed thinking on civil government and its responsibilities before God:
- a. “Presbyterians and the American Revolution: An Interpretive Account” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54:1 Spring 1976 See also: <https://pcusa.org/historical-society/exhibits/presbyterians-and-american-revolution#1>
 - b. James Gigantino, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865*. (Phila.: University of Pennsylvania, 2016).
 - c. John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*: <https://archive.org/details/lecturesonmoralp00with/page/n23/mode/2up>
 - d. Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, *John Witherspoon: Parson, Politician, Patriot* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/JohnKnox, 1976).
 - e. William Thomson Hanzsche, *Forgotten Founding Fathers of the American Church and State* (Boston: Christopher Publishing, 1954)
 - f. GL Hunt ed. *Calvinism and the Political Order* (Phila.: Westminster Press, 1965)
 - g. Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?* (NY: Farrar, Straus, 2018). The essays ‘What is Freedom of Conscience?’, ‘Our Public Conversation,’ and ‘Old Souls, New World’ deal with the influence of Puritanism and the English Civil War on US governance, notably in the Massachusetts Body of Liberties of 1641, a precursor of the Bill of Rights.
 - h. Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
 - i. James Calvin Davis, *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2008) & *The Character of A Nation: John Witherspoon and the Moral Foundation of the United States* (forthcoming: 1/8/2026)
 - j. Ray R. Roberts, *A Democratic and Republican Faith: Public Theology for a Time of Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishing, forthcoming: 2026)
 - k. John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (NY: Basic Books, 1984), in particular the Epilogue, “Liberalism and Calvinism in Contemporary America.”
 - l. Gary Dorrien, *A Darkly Radiant Vision: The Black Social Gospel in the Shadow of MLK* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023). The third volume of a comprehensive study of African-American contributions to US American thinking on justice, governance, rights, etc.
- E. The commission to be authorized, and others working on the importance of the rule of “laws not men” for democracy, should note significant recent social witness policy of the General Assembly, including:

- a. God Alone is Lord of the Conscience (1988), a major study and statement on religious liberty. <https://pcusa.org/resource/god-alone-lord-conscience-1988>
- b. Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform (2008) https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/acswp_voting_rights.pdf
- c. A Letter to Presbyterians (1953): <https://pcusa.org/resource/letter-presbyterians-pcusa-1953-general-council-challenge-mccarthyism>
- d. Honest Patriotism (2018) <https://pcusa.org/resource/honest-patriotism-and-two-shorter-resolutions-faith-and-politics> [] [] []