

COUNTY COUNCIL OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

2003 Legislative Session

Resolution No. CR-37-2003

Proposed by Council Member Peters

Introduced by Council Members Peters, Dean, Exum, Dernoga and Harrington

Co-Sponsors _____

Date of Introduction July 1, 2003

RESOLUTION

1 A RESOLUTION concerning

2 Supporting the Reappointment of Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer

3 For the purpose of supporting the efforts of the Committee to Clear Chaplain Plummer to seek
4 review and reappointment by the United States Army and Congress of Chaplain Henry Vinton
5 Plummer, a Prince George's County native and the first African-American Chaplain to be
6 commissioned in the United States Army (post-Reconstruction), who was court-martialed and
7 dishonorably discharged in 1894.

8 WHEREAS, Henry Vinton Plummer was born a slave in 1844 to Emily Saunders Plummer
9 and Adam Francis Plummer on the Three Sisters Plantation (near the land now comprising the
10 vicinity of Bowie); and

11 WHEREAS, in the Spring of 1862, at the age of 18, Henry Plummer escaped from his slave
12 owners in Ellicott Mills, Maryland and made his way to Washington, D.C.; and

13 WHEREAS, he joined the United States Navy and served three years (1862 to 1865) in the
14 Civil War; and

15 WHEREAS, following his discharge from the United States Navy, he returned to his family
16 and lived at the Riversdale Plantation, where his father was the foreman, and in 1867, married
17 the former Julia Lomax, the mother of their nine children; and

18 WHEREAS, in 1871, he enrolled in Wayland Seminary of Washington, D.C. and
19 completed his studies for the ministry in 1879; and

20 WHEREAS, he served as Pastor of the St. Paul Baptist Church, then located in
21 Bladensburg, Maryland, which was founded by his older sister, Sarah Miranda, and later at the
22 Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.; and

1 WHEREAS, in 1884, United States President Chester Arthur commissioned Henry Vinton
2 Plummer as the first African-American Chaplain of the United States Army in the post-
3 Reconstruction era, on the recommendation of Frederick Douglass and other African-American
4 leaders of the day; and

5 WHEREAS, Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer was assigned to the Ninth Cavalry (Buffalo
6 Soldiers), where he held the rank equivalent to that of a Captain, and served a ten-year
7 distinguished tenure at Fort Riley, Kansas, Fort McKinney, Wyoming, and Fort Robinson,
8 Nebraska; and

9 WHEREAS, because of the color of his skin, he and his family were not afforded the
10 respect and dignity despite his service as an officer, including boarding with enlisted men; and

11 WHEREAS, in August 1894, charges were raised against him for “conduct unbecoming
12 an officer and a gentleman”; and

13 WHEREAS, on September 7, 1894, by general court-martial, Chaplain Henry Vinton
14 Plummer was dismissed from the United States Army, and the Secretary of War directed that the
15 sentence take effect on November 10, 1894; and

16 WHEREAS, on November 12, 1894, Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer wrote an appeal to
17 President Grover Cleveland which was denied; and

18 WHEREAS, upon his discharge, he and his family moved to Kansas, where he held office
19 in the Kansas State Baptist Convention, as Deputy Sanitary Sergeant of Kansas City, and was
20 Pastor of Rosehill Baptist Church, and until his death in February 1905, he maintained his
21 innocence and continued his appeal for reappointment, citing “false testimony and prejudice” as
22 reasons for his dismissal; and

23 WHEREAS, since 1997, family and other interested persons, led by the Reverend L.
24 Jerome Fowler, the great-great nephew of Chaplain Plummer, have been meeting, researching
25 records, and gathering support from military, clergy and political leaders; and

26 WHEREAS, in 2001, the group formed the “Committee to Clear Chaplain Plummer,”
27 whose purpose is to request a review of the court-martial and dishonorable discharge by the
28 United States Army, United States Congress, and the President of the United States with the goal
29 to clear the name of Chaplain Plummer; and

30 WHEREAS, the Committee to Clear Chaplain Plummer has assembled a considerable
31 historical record to support the review before by the United States Army, Congress and the

1 President.

2 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the County Council of Prince George's
3 County, Maryland, that the President of the United States, the United States Congress, the
4 Secretary of Defense, and the United States Army are encouraged to review the record,
5 surrounding the court-martial of Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer, and to review his
6 reappointment as a Chaplain; and

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the Council is directed to send a copy of
8 this Resolution to each member of the Maryland Delegation to the United States Congress, the
9 President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, and the
10 Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

Adopted this 15th day of July, 2003.

COUNTY COUNCIL OF PRINCE
GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

BY: _____
Peter A. Shapiro
Chair

ATTEST:

Redis C. Floyd
Clerk of the Council