

Cathedral to remove glass Confederate flags

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [July 6, 2016](#) issue

The Washington National Cathedral will replace depictions of the Confederate flag in its stained-glass windows with plain glass but maintain adjoining panes honoring Confederate generals for at least two years while it fosters discussions about the church and race relations.

A task force spent six months determining what to do with the two windows after former cathedral dean Gary Hall, responding to the murders at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, declared, “It is time to take those windows out.”

The man charged with the crime embraced the Confederate flag.

The cathedral’s board concluded that the windows should remain up for now, minus the Confederate flag panes, and serve as a stimulus for discussions, including one scheduled for July 17 titled “What the White Church Must Do.”

“The windows provide a catalyst for honest discussions about race and the legacy of slavery and for addressing the uncomfortable and too often avoided issues of race in America,” the task force stated in its report. “Moreover, the windows serve as a profound witness to the cathedral’s own complex history in relationship to race.”

In the letter announcing the decision in June, cathedral board members acknowledged that there are intense feelings about the best way to handle the controversial windows.

“We have heard from those who feel strongly that the windows should stay intact as uncomfortable reminders of our shared history, others who believe that the windows should be removed entirely, and some who feel that the windows are appropriate monuments to admirable American leaders,” they said.

Asked if removing the panels featuring the flag but keeping the depictions of the Confederate generals was a compromise, Kevin Eckstrom, the cathedral’s chief communications officer, said, “The windows have prompted the questions and now

we hope they're going to be part of the discussion that helps us get to the answers."

The cathedral is determining the timing and the cost of removing the windows. Officials said private donors will cover the cost.

After the discussion process—during which cathedral officials said they will examine the cathedral's other artwork that refers to its racial legacy—a decision will be made about the windows honoring Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

"The Lee-Jackson windows are clear on their message of saluting heroism," the task force said in its 17-page report. "Yet, they also present an opportunity to tell additional stories of the lives oppressed by the institutions Lee and Jackson fought to preserve."

The cathedral, which opened in 1912, was first approached about a window honoring Lee in 1931. The cathedral later decided to honor Jackson as well. The panes were dedicated in 1953.

The decision comes as other congregations and religious groups are re-examining race relations and past support for Confederate flags.

The Southern Baptist Convention, born in 1845 in a split over its support for slavery, passed a resolution rejecting the Confederate flag June 14 at its delegate meeting in St. Louis.

"We call our brothers and sisters in Christ to discontinue the display of the Confederate battle flag," the resolution states.

Pastor Dwight McKissic of Arlington, Texas, proposed the resolution in part to honor the nine Emanuel AME members killed a year earlier.

James Merritt, a former convention president who said he was the descendant of two Confederate Army members, helped draft the language, including striking a paragraph saying the flag also serves for some as a memorial to those who died in the Civil War.

Russell Moore, the denomination's chief ethicist, welcomed the resolution.

“Today, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination voted to repudiate the Confederate battle flag and it’s time and well past time,” Moore said. —Religion News Service

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