



A Story of Renewal and Reconciliation

Covenant Presbyterian Church • Charlotte, North Carolina

Stained glass windows sparkled like jewels around the sanctuary of Covenant Presbyterian Church on Sunday, May 25, 2025.

For 72 years, these glorious windows had been telling the stories of our faith: Old Testament on one side, New Testament on the other, Jesus crucified and resurrected in front of us as we worship in the pews, figures from church history in the transepts and narthex, and the ascended Christ beckoning us into renewed life as we leave the sanctuary.

But this Sunday was different. For the first time, some images in the windows had been changed.

This was a day to celebrate our mission to welcome and serve all people as part of God's beloved community, where divisions of race and color, North and South, segregation and separation do not exist.

It was a day to ask forgiveness, acknowledge that symbols matter, and boldly reconcile the artistic representation of our faith with our ongoing ministry. It was a day to affirm that our lives of faith are not stagnant but always transforming us in obedience to God through Christ and led by the Holy Spirit.

Worshiping together, Covenant's mostly white congregation and our guests from mostly Black congregations raised voices in prayer and song to dedicate new stained glass lancets in the history and service windows. After five years of study, discernment, and artistic creation, Covenant had removed images from gifted to the church in 1953: representations of Presbyterian leaders who had served the Confederacy in a time when segregation was still the law of the land, when racial division in all aspects of life was common social practice.

We replaced the lancets to highlight the important contributions made during the same span of years by those long marginalized: women, African Americans, and educational and community institutions.

The exchange was seamless, with new panels designed in the same style and colors by experts from the same company that had produced the original windows all those years ago.

Telling inspiring stories that we long needed to celebrate were images of the Reverend Doctors Daniel Jackson Sanders, Katie Geneva Cannon, Rachel Henderlite and Elo Leon Henderson, as well as the Catawba Presbytery and college students representing The Stapleton-Davidson interns.

Born in Winnsboro, SC, **Dr. Sanders (1847-1907)** was a formerly enslaved person who attended Western Theological Seminary (now Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). A Presbyterian minister in the Catawba Presbytery of Black churches, he served as the first black president of Biddle University – now Johnson C. Smith University, from which he had graduated.

Having grown up in nearby Gastonia, **Dr. Henderlite (1905-1991)** graduated from Agnes Scott College, New York University and Yale Divinity School. She was the first white woman ordained in the Southern Presbyterian Church (1965). She worked to advance equal rights of ethnic minorities and, as Director of Curriculum for PCUS, helped develop the Covenant Life Curriculum in the 1960s.

Dr. Cannon (1950-2018) was born in nearby Kannapolis. She earned degrees from Barber-Scotia, JCS Theological Seminary, and was the first Black PhD recipient Union Seminary in New York, from which she received the Union Medal, the highest award of distinction. She was named Distinguished Professor of Religion at Davidson College in 2016. She was the first Black woman ordained in the Northern Presbyterian Church (1974). While she and Dr. Henderlite stand on their own merits, these two women together represent a significant history change in the leadership of the Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Henderson (1908-1990), a South Carolinian who graduated from JCSU seminary, made headlines across the South as an early civil rights leader in the 1950s and '60s with calls for social and economic justice. He was the organizing minister of Grier Heights Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, the first Black executive of the Catawba Presbytery, and established an early integrated housing project called Sharon Manor Apartments.

Established on October 6, 1866, during the Reconstruction era, the **Catawba Presbytery** served African American Presbyterians in North Carolina and South Carolina. Beyond establishing congregations, it founded vital educational institutions for Black communities, most notably Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, NC. The historic body was dissolved on December 31, 1988, as the northern and southern Presbyterian branches integrated.

The addition of **The Stapleton-Davidson interns** in the Davidson College panel highlights the long, special relationship between Covenant and the college, which was founded in

1837 by Concord Presbytery, and efforts to make an impact on needs in our community. Covenant members Don Davidson and Anne Stapleton Davidson founded the internship program in 1989. Continuing to this day, the fellowship helps students from diverse backgrounds and demonstrating financial need to gain experience in volunteering with community organizations in Charlotte during a summer of full-time service among the urban poor.

The exchange of windows was seamless. But the five-year decision process was not. After 72 years, how did we arrive at this service, at this moment?

“ALREADY AT THE TABLE”

It might have been a coincidence that the dedication service was held on May 25, 2025. But, according to senior minister Bob Henderson, the impetus for the process that led our church to this day was the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

George Floyd, Jr., was a 46-year-old African American man, born in North Carolina. He was murdered by a white police officer in Minneapolis during an arrest made after a store clerk suspected Floyd of using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. The millions of people who saw the bystander’s video on the news will never forget the sight of the officer kneeling on George’s neck for almost nine minutes, asphyxiating him as he gasped, “I can’t breathe.” Almost immediately, protests against police brutality, especially toward Black citizens, broke out across the United States and around the globe, amid calls for an end to prejudice and racism in all its forms. Other police killings attracted international attention, including two in Charlotte. In the midst of a global pandemic, multiple events cultivated violence. Police were facing angry crowds.

Statues were pulled down, and protesters were arrested as they called for police accountability and justice. “Black Lives Matter” and “I Can’t Breathe” became rallying cries. Individuals, churches, schools, businesses, and institutions began intentional efforts to determine where they needed to change. In time, buildings, schools, and streets were being renamed, old trademarks were abandoned, and discussions about race were becoming deeper, more intense, and more open.

Covenant has a long history of working toward racial reconciliation and inclusion.

When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in April of 1968, founding minister Dr. Warner Hall rode with the police in predominantly Black neighborhoods to meet with residents as they protested and grieved. Over the years, numerous classes, partnerships, conferences, events, and projects of Covenant have focused on ways to serve segregated communities, mitigate racial and economic disparity, increase diversity, improve the well-being of all people, and encourage the welcoming of all people in the name of Jesus Christ.

The church is the body of Christ, established by him to carry out the Great Commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your mind and soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Whatever the church says or does, wherever it goes or worships, love is its mission.

In 2020, as calls for long-lasting social change proliferated, “we had already been looking into it,” Bob says. “We were already at the table. The Christian Church has clear marching orders: a long obedience. So how can we be more intentional? What do we need to do to make sustainable changes and progress? It is not enough to adopt slogans and wave signs. We need to create awareness and inculcate it in our system. We are not a ‘cancel culture.’ In fact, quite the opposite. We long to give voice to those whose voices and stories have long been canceled by culture.”

CLEAR MARCHING ORDERS

During the turbulent weeks following George Floyd’s murder, Covenant’s Planning and Evaluation Board (P&E) outlined a nine-point framework for Covenant’s response to the deeply ingrained racial issues in our country, community, and church. Here is part of their work.

How do we, as followers of Jesus Christ, conduct ourselves, individually and as a congregation, with respect to these issues?

Many people believe that our country is close to losing what it can become and, if we don’t act now in a substantial and lasting way, it (and we) will be lost. There is a vitriolic divide in the U.S and the belief that common citizens must take the lead in reducing this divide.

In such a setting, what is a Christian to do? What we are called to do: consider Jesus’s teaching of the two great commandments – to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves – and implement them into our lives.

The nine points called for acknowledging continuing racism in our culture, systems, church, and ourselves. They called for self-examination, prayer, education, measurable actions, openness and humility, and creating more opportunities for change and reconciliation.

All six of our ministry areas participated: worship, education, congregational life, pastoral care, missions and outreach, and administration.

Our response would require an examination of Covenant’s curriculum, sermons, investments, buildings, art and symbols. This included the sanctuary, where the stained

glass windows are the clearest symbolic representation of who we are and what we believe.

P&E appointed an Arts Task Force (ATF) of eleven members. Their job was to examine Covenant's buildings and art to determine whether there were "representations regarding individuals or acts supportive of racism" and, if there were, to make a recommendation regarding their presence. They sought to follow the biblical directive from Philippians: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ."

What story were they saying that defied our mission of love for all people?

A MINISTRY OF COLOR

Charlotte's Second Presbyterian and Westminster Presbyterian churches formed a covenant in 1947 to found Covenant Presbyterian Church. The ministers and the combined 2,400 members continued to worship in their own buildings while their leaders were establishing committees for fundraising, campus layout, architecture, buildings, and design on the Morehead Street property of Westminster. Built first were the Education Building and Fellowship Hall, where worship services and Sunday School thrived beginning in June of 1951. In the same beautiful limestone and granite, the chapel, and the cruciform sanctuary rose in Gothic style on the site of Westminster's former Tudor-style church. Covenant was modeled not after cathedrals but after the more intimate English parish churches. In a city yet to sprout skyscrapers, our steeple beckoned residents and visitors for miles around.

Old newspaper clippings attest to local and national interest in the new church, not only for the congregation's historic, sacrificial pledging to fund it, but for the sheer beauty and attention to every detail in its construction. Everything had a religious meaning, from the arches that pointed upward to the dominant colors in the windows: blue for God, sky, and spirit, and red for Adam, clay, and blood.

Covenant's stained glass windows tell the story of our Christian faith, from creation to the early-twentieth-century Presbyterian Church. They were designed by founding minister Dr. Warner Hall, working with Dr. John Willet of the acclaimed Willet Studios in Philadelphia. Lively correspondence between the two learned men in those early days of planning attests to the growing friendship, intellect, good humor, and deep faith they shared. As they collaborated and visited cities with architects, engineers, contractors, and one another, Dr. Willet wrote of his excitement to be involved. "I have been following your church with a great deal of interest. It is about the finest group of church buildings in the South. (These windows) must be just as fine a fenestration as can be found in any church in the country."

After one visit, he wrote, “Dr. Hall ‘poured’ me onto the New Yorker (train) with iconography popping out of every part of me.” Within a few months, they were addressing each other by their first names. Dr. Hall told the congregation that he had been appointed “a committee of one” to plan the windows and that, “while that made it easy to get together a quorum, it was not always easy to get a meeting of the minds.”

Organized into several groupings, the windows bring out the central themes of faith. In the sanctuary, the four east nave windows chronicle highlights of the Old Testament. The four west nave windows depict the birth, early life and ministry of Jesus. In the transepts we see highlights from the history and service of the Christian church, as well as the prayer and psalm windows. In the apse, the crowning glory of the narrative are the images of Christ’s passion, crucifixion, and resurrection.

In the chapel, three east windows portray the Lord of Death, Life, and Nature, while the west windows interpret biblical passages about the Kingdom of God. The gallery shows the righteous doing good works from the final judgment in Matthew. The apse portrays the Trinity.

Originally, with costs accelerating, only the windows in the apses (front) of the sanctuary and chapel were to be completed in stained glass, with the rest filled in plain glass until additional funding became available. However – after conferring with Dr. Willet, Dr. Hall, and building chairperson John Erwin – the Session approved a budget increase, and a second campaign was successful.

As it turned out, Covenant pledges exceeded the new budget. Members generously donated windows and other features. When the German woodcarvers found out that the wooden railings in the choir loft were to be plain, they asked for the names of famous religious composers, then carved them at no extra cost to the church. When it was discovered that the back window had been omitted from the budget, Dr. Willet personally donated the Christ the King window in memory of his father. From the day Covenant began until the building debt was retired 15 years later, annual benevolent giving never fell below the combined total of the two founding churches prior to the merger – even while members were also paying their pledges for the building fund.

Under the headline “Outstanding Church of the South is Completed,” *The Mecklenburg Presbyterian* described Covenant as “a place of cathedral beauty and significance...unspeakable beauty and an atmosphere of reverence and worship.”

At the first worship service in the sanctuary on December 20, 1953, following “O Come All Ye Faithful,” Dr. Hall proclaimed to those filling the space:

This is a day of great joy for all of us. This church has not risen of itself. It has been built, stone upon stone, out of the sacrifice of you who love the Lord and wish to

have the joy of serving Him.... So it is that you have responded with nobility that is born of the grace of God in our hearts.

Dr. Willett said the windows were “a ministry of color...the crowning glory of the church in a beautiful setting.”

Ushers distributed more than 1,500 bulletins that day in a space built for 1,000, and, when they tidied up after the service, they found fewer than 15 left in the pews. Worshipers passed through the carved wooden doors over which were engraved the Latin phrase *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*,” which means “To the Greater Glory of God.”

PAINFUL AND IMPORTANT

A church is a community of followers of Jesus – not a building. But the building is one of the voices that speak for Jesus in that community.

And so, in 2020, Covenant’s newly appointed Task Force was aware of its important role in the ongoing history of our church. On behalf of congregations past, present, and future, they were facing significant questions of faith. In this time, in this sacred space, in this art on our walls, are we following the Great Commandment? Proclaiming the greater glory of God? Seeking the mind of Jesus Christ? Communicating what we are preaching from the pulpit and living through our ministry? Specifically, are there representations of people or actions supportive of racism? If so, what should we do about it?

For the next eighteen months, the men and women on the task force prayerfully embarked on a journey of research, study, learning, introspection, and discussion about how the church arrived at this day in history and where we are led to go from here. They soon noted that the windows depict Christian history from biblical times to the early twentieth century, from Paul and Barnabas (45 AD) to John Calvin (sixteenth century) and ending with history and service windows depicting nineteenth- and twentieth-century Confederate generals and politicians with tenuous connections to the Presbyterian Church.

No women were depicted in the windows that celebrate the history of the Presbyterian Church. In the Service window, the only Black representations were a generic minister and a mention of Stillman College, the first HBCU sponsored by PCUS back in 1875. There were slave owners and segregationists from the Civil War era until the early twentieth century. The committee started with a list of twelve men in the windows to investigate.

As discord grew louder across the country, people started out with differing opinions. Some wanted every suggestion of racism removed. Others felt that to remove anything would be denying history. Some suggested a compromise to leave the windows as they were, with plaques acknowledging our human sinfulness and awareness of injustice. Others felt that

any money donated should be used not to replace windows but to address the lasting effects of racism on people today.

“We had to decide what kind of process we could use and still remain friends,” says Betty Graybeal, then chair of P&E who served on both task forces. “I worried about making decisions that might cause friction and people would leave the church. But we engaged in listening, reflection, and brainstorming. We sat in a circle and each of us described what we were thinking and feeling. Not responding to each other but sharing just our own thoughts, listening and reflecting. It was educational. Non-threatening. Spiritual. Powerful. We did a lot of personal examination.”

“Our discernment process was disciplined,” says Will Summerville, who served as chair of the task force. “This was a catalyst for us, painful and important. It opened our eyes to the racism that was there. People hadn’t thought about it because we hadn’t been looking. We didn’t have access to the rationale for why it was there.”

“Why were these people here?” committee member Jerry Jernigan remembers wondering. “We had no access to the thinking of those who decided. It was 1950, and Covenant was a very Southern city, and that’s the way it was. As we researched some of these specific Presbyterians with ties to slavery and segregation, we didn’t want to condemn them as human beings. All lives are complicated. But we can judge who and what we celebrate, and racism did not belong in our church sanctuary.”

“The number of slave owners in the windows humbled us,” Jerry says. “They could be good people doing some good work who had fatal flaws, blindness, and acceptance of the status quo. And that led us to ask, ‘Are we doing that ourselves, today?’ We had deeper realizations of our white privilege, the ingrained inequality. A lot of people deny it. But we were led to self-examination about our own blind spots, flaws, and acceptance of the status quo. It was emotional and exhausting.”

TURNING TO THE EXPERTS

The committee consulted renowned experts. They included Dr. Willie Griffin, staff historian with Levine Museum of the New South; Karen Cox, UNC Charlotte history professor and author of *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Justice*; Dr. John W. Kuykendall, the fifteenth president of his alma mater, Davidson College, with degrees from Union Theological Seminary, Yale Divinity School and Princeton University, who had strong history with Covenant; and Dr. Erskine Clark, a leading historian of the Presbyterian Church. He provided the group with a list of outstanding individuals in the history of our denomination who might be worthy of recognition.

Other sources included The Presbyterian Historical Society; UNCC Special Collections; Grief Heights Presbyterian historian Vera Lewers and retired minister Calvin Lewers; Bill Harris, First United Presbyterian Church elder and Natalie Beard, Clerk of Session; the Katie Geneva Cannon Digital Collection, and Sheila Bumgarner, librarian at the Carolina Room of Charlotte Mecklenburg Library; the Johnson C. Smith library, and Rev. Drs. Jerry Cannon and Ed Newberry, both friends of Covenant.

The task force also researched proceedings at Princeton, Yale, the National Cathedral, and Davidson College, all of which had faced similar decisions to rename or remove images on their campuses.

The ATF regularly updated the congregation, hosting presentations and discussion sessions attended by several hundred members. They received thoughtful letters and emails expressing differing feelings and opinions. After seven months of research, they produced articles in two Covenant newsletters in addition to Facebook postings, a digital video with the senior minister, and an educational series on three Wednesday nights using Zoom with breakout sessions because of pandemic restrictions. About 100 people participated each time. They also posted on the church website a professional video that included interviews with Task Force members and a representative member of the congregation.

Finally, the committee met with representatives of two firms specializing in stained glass windows, including Willet Hauser Studios, now run by John Willet, Jr., son of the master of Covenant's windows and a friend of our congregation. Would it be possible to replace some of the lancets? How much would it cost? Would it be the best use of funds, and where would those funds come from?

According to Will, "over two years, we asked a lot of questions. We dealt with a lot of complexity in human beings. It was interesting to watch us come together. As we came to a consensus, we all felt humbled and grateful."

In the end, the Arts Task Force decided that inaction was not an option.

REMOVAL AND REPLACEMENT

In their 2022 final report, the group presented the following summary.

It is an understatement to say that the windows are extraordinary and beautiful. The many scenes and stories depicted create a comforting and familiar environment, especially for those who have studied the same or have simply heard about them from the pulpit. The windows can teach us and help us in our faith journeys. They promote a sense of transcendence and inspire us to be faithful. They comfort us in

times of loss and provide a sense of home. They often equip us to honor God by living in a way that recognizes one community in Jesus Christ.

However, we came to recognize that the actions and views of some of the individuals memorialized in the windows create a worship space that is not welcoming to all. It was disappointing to learn that many who were involved in the history of the church and Presbyterianism were blind to the injustice of racist practices. We believe these individuals sought to live helpful and productive Christian lives. Nevertheless, some engaged in action or expressed views that are at odds with our desire to be a faithful and welcoming congregation.

They unanimously recommended the removal and replacement of the sections that depicted the following four people.

- **D.H. Hill (1821-1889)** was depicted in the Service Window because he was a devout Presbyterian and a “great teacher” at several colleges, including nearby Davidson, which was supported by Presbyterian churches. Hill was a Civil War general who fought with Robert E. Lee near Richmond. He was born into a slave-owning family and likely owned slaves himself.
- **Stonewall Jackson, (1824-1863)**, depicted in the windows with a cannon and two Confederate soldiers, had close ties to Charlotte and was an officer in the Presbyterian church. He is known as the most prominent Confederate general after Robert E. Lee. He was described as fanatical in his faith, but his writings provide no insight into his views on slavery. He owned at least two slaves, and his wife brought three more to their marriage as a dowry.
- **Benjamin Palmer (1818-1902)** was the first moderator of the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States. In 1860 he preached a fiery sermon – commonly called the “Thanksgiving Sermon” – in which he laid out a theological defense of slavery, called for the southern states to secede and for armed resistance to protect slavery. Though his ministry included feeding the hungry, caring for cholera patients, and other good deeds, his views on slavery did not change even to his death 40 year after the war.
- **Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)** had close ties to Charlotte, was an officer in the Presbyterian Church, president of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey, and president of the United States (1913-1921). At Princeton, he prevented the enrollment of Black students. As U.S. president, he instituted policies that re-segregated the federal civil service after it had been integrated for decades. During his presidency, he hosted a White House screening of the infamous pro-Ku Klux Klan film “Birth of a Nation.”

The ATF proposed that a second task force be formed to recommend replacements for the panels. Their report included cost estimates from Willet Hauser Studios and suggestions for how a seamless change could be achieved.

Finally, a service of worship would be held to acknowledge the actions taken, mourn the injustices of the past and those that continue to this day, celebrate God's presence in our space with or without windows, and give thanks for God's presence continually at work in the Covenant community.

The report was accepted by P&E, approved by Session in late 2022, and a second task force began deliberating about who and what to celebrate in the new lancets of our windows.

WHO AND WHAT DO WE CHOOSE TO CELEBRATE?

The second task force was charged with honoring the significant contributions of important twentieth- and twenty-first century Presbyterians in the Charlotte community, highlighting women and African American leaders.

Their selections would be based on these criteria:

- Deep roots in the Presbyterian Church
- Influence on Christian theology and practice
- African Americans and women overlooked in the original designs
- Ties to local or regional churches, seminaries, or Covenant
- Tells the story that welcomes all to Covenant and builds bridges with the broader community
- Fits logically in the historical context of the existing windows

"We all came from different parts of the country, different states and backgrounds," said chairperson John Baxter. "So, we started by learning about what has changed in the Church in the last 70 years: the combining of the Southern and Northern Presbyterian churches, the ordination of women, the leadership of Black ministers and educational institutions, the importance of Catawba Presbytery (group of Black churches now absorbed into surrounding presbyteries) and its variety of churches."

The team consulted a long list of experts and resources to identify outstanding twentieth-century church leaders. In addition to those who had helped the first ATF, they consulted with UNC Charlotte Special Collections, the Presbyterian Historical Society, Johnson C. Smith Library, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Carolina room staff, and professors who specialized in African American history. Local leaders from Grier Heights Presbyterian and First United Presbyterian were helpful. Once again, those who aided the first committee

worked with the group. UNC Charlotte African American history professors Dr. Willie Griffin, who grew up in our region, and Dr. Chris Cameron, along with Dr. Erskine Clark were especially helpful in providing a long list of people and institutions to celebrate.

The committee lined up the candidates chronologically and thematically to fit within the narrative of the windows. Said Betty Graybeal, “Compared to the hard, emotional work on the first task force, this was fascinating and exciting. We ended up with a huge list of so many great people who could go into our windows. We were into the fun part.”

There had been noted improvement in race relations within the Presbyterian Church in the designated period, and it was past time to celebrate those who helped to make it happen. The group divided up the long list of nominees and, after months of prayerful consideration, they voted unanimously to recommend Dr. Sanders, Dr. Henderlite, Dr. Cannon, Dr. Henderson, and the Stapleton-Davidson interns.

Throughout the process, the congregation was invited to give feedback. According to Betty, “along the way, some was positive and some was negative. But looking with fresh minds, in light of all the changes in society and social awareness in the past 70 years, many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to deepen our understanding of our church’s complicated relationship with racism.”

Meanwhile, the Session had voted to finance the changes with donations from those who wanted to contribute. In Covenant’s tradition, some funds would be allocated to related ministries. Many in our congregation responded. Among those donors were heirs of members who had originally gifted those windows to Covenant seven decades earlier. “They were very much in favor of the change, and they contributed generously,” said Bob.

As has been the tradition at Covenant since its founding, the church also presented a meaningful financial gift to an important area of outside ministry. Through Habitat for Humanity, we supported a renewal project at Plato Price, the site of an historic all-Black school that was closed in 1966, and the building was later demolished. Located on Morris Field Drive in Charlotte, it has been redeveloped into a 39-home affordable housing community as a collaboration among Habitat’s Charlotte region, the City of Charlotte, and the Ally Charitable Foundation.

While the second ATF was deciding whom to honor in the new windows, the church requested a comprehensive estimate from the Willet Hauser Studios. That firm would temporarily remove the two glass lancets and replace them with acrylic duplicates that did not include images that were being replaced; those parts were plain blue and red acrylic. Their artisans would work with the church to design the new panels in the same beautiful, distinctive style, colors, and meticulous attention to detail as the original windows. When the four replacements were approved, Covenant sent them details, pictures, and ideas,

and the designers went to work. In spring 2024, Session approved the final drawings and production in the studios began.

On Sunday, July 14, 2024, our ministers led us in a brief Service of Worship for Healing and Hope to commemorate the removal process and soon-to-be replacements. Amid some tears, the congregation prayed together:

O God, you made us in your image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family. Take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts. Break down the walls that separate us; unite us in the bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

BELOVED COMMUNITY: A CALL FOR COURAGE

In the following months, celebrating a seventy-year partnership, Covenant and Willet collaborated, blending historic craftsmanship with a vision of justice, faith, and beauty in stained glass. A new generation of artists and visionaries at Willet Hauser knew all about Covenant, respected our legacy, and were excited to carry it forward.

Lead designer Mark Bleakley felt honored and inspired by the project. “To help churches tell their story in stained glass brings together my love for the Gospel and for art. “The Covenant team provided detailed research for each person and story we wanted to portray to highlight vital pieces of church history.

During the process, Bob Henderson and Jerry Jernigan visited the studios in Minnesota. They were impressed and excited about the work, and they appreciated that Covenant was still remembered there. “We wanted the new work to echo the 1950s windows,” Kathy Jordan, director of Art Development, told them. Artist Manley Dahler embraced the challenge of blending the old with the new. “They’re classic fifties Willet windows,” he said. “Beautifully done – and fun to work on. It’s always a challenge to match that look, and it’s incredibly rewarding.”

The artisans used a palette that included their signature “Willet Blue” along with vivid teals, Caribbean aquas, glowing reds, and radiant yellows. Every brush stroke, every texture was hand-crafted. The result was so seamless that even Kathy Jordan once mistook Manley’s new panels for the originals. By all accounts, they did a wonderful job.

At Covenant today, you cannot tell the difference between all the original windows and the new panels. Dr. Hall and Dr. Willett would be celebrating with us the magnificence of the work and the Christian story it tells.

The important difference is in the hearts of the people who are seeing more clearly the great injustices of the past. It is in the lives and hearts of people whose families have suffered for centuries and generations from the effects of racism, and who can feel a little more hope that things will continue to change.

On May 25, 2025, our guests from Grier Heights Presbyterian Church – whose former minister now looked down at us from his place in our windows of history – joined us in worship. In the front of the aisle, wearing a beautiful “Willet blue” suit and hat along with the white flowers given from Covenant to our guests, was the mother of the late Katie Geneva Cannon, the youngest of those celebrated in the new windows, who had died seven years earlier. Among her many accomplishments, Dr. Cannon had served as the first Black woman ordained in the Northern Presbyterian Church, when she was just 24 years old. Such an honor it was for Covenant to memorialize her and the others in our sanctuary.

The service ended with these words of prayer:

May these windows be for us not only a decoration, but a proclamation – signs of your coming kingdom, glimpses of the new heaven and new earth you are making among us. May they sing of hope. May they call us to courage. May they renew our vision of Beloved Community and of Christ-like kinship. Amen.

AN INVITATION

Covenant Presbyterian is a dynamic Christian community that gladly invites all people into a transformational experience of faith; boldly proclaims the gospel; bravely works toward a whole and just world; and passionately nurtures discipleship.

We hope you will visit our church and see the new windows in all their humble glory. If possible, come on a Sunday and worship with us. Stay after the service to enjoy refreshments and fellowship.

Covenant Presbyterian is located at 1000 East Morehead Street in Charlotte, NC 28204.

Learn more about our church on our website at covenantpresby.org.

Call our main office at 704-333-9071 during the week, Monday through Friday.