



For Immediate Release – June 18, 2013

Mayor's Agent Upholds Protection of Historic Epworth Church at 700 A Street, NE

The DC Mayor's Agent has ruled that the character-defining stained glass windows at the historic church at 700 A Street, NE, may not be removed.

The community was shocked when the new owner of the historic church at 700 A Street, NE, began to remove its stained glass windows in 2011. The church, built in 1892, is a major contributing building in the Capitol Hill Historic District. The DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) found in March 2012 that the application of the new owner, the World Mission Society, Inc. (Church of God) (World Mission Society), to remove the windows is inconsistent with the purposes of the DC Preservation Act. The World Mission Society filed an administrative appeal of HPRB's finding with the Mayor's Agent that was heard May 18, 2012.

The World Mission Society argued that denying it a permit to remove the windows would violate the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (42 USC §§ 2000cc et seq.) (RLUIPA), which is designed to protect religious liberty in administering land use regulations. The World Mission Society maintains it cannot worship in the presence of images in the stained glass windows. However, the Mayor's Agent held that RLUIPA did not require removal of the windows because the church "created the conflict between the preservation law and its religious doctrine. It purchased this historic church because it was affordable. It knew that the building was within a historic district but completely failed to investigate whether it could lawfully remove the windows it knew that it could not live with." The Mayor's Agent also found that the church had failed to establish that retaining the windows was an undue economic hardship.

ANC 6C, CHRS, the DC Preservation League, the Capitol Hill Coalition for Sensible Development (CHCSD), the ANC6A03 commissioner, and neighbors successfully argued that the stained glass windows must remain in the Epworth Church. CHRS also helped CHCSD establish a legal defense fund to protect the historic church and is grateful to everyone who contributed.

The Decision and Order in the Matter of World Mission Society, Inc. (Church of God), HPA No. 12-263, is posted at <http://tinyurl.com/k9y5z56>.