

HSU horseback riders no longer carry Confederate flag

August 30, 2017

ABILENE—Riders of the Six White Horses—equestrian ambassadors for Hardin-Simmons University—no longer will carry a Confederate flag.

Although the student team originated 90 years ago as two riders, one carrying a United States flag and the other carrying a Texas flag, for many years six riders have displayed the six flags that have flown over Texas. The Six White Horses represent the university in parades, rodeos and some sporting events.

The flag representing the Confederate States of America was the “Stars and Bars,” not the more familiar Rebel battle flag that was appropriated by some white supremacist groups.

‘Flags can be divisive symbols’

Even so, Hardin-Simmons announced Aug. 25 the riders will display only the United States and Texas flags, rather than continuing to carry the flag representing the Confederacy.

“Each flag carries with it a context,” HSU President Eric Bruntmyer wrote in a letter to faculty and staff. “In ideal circumstances, flags are unifying symbols, serving as common representations of purpose and pride. In other cases, however, flags can be divisive symbols which create conflict and disunity.”

Hardin-Simmons announced its decision five days after the University of Texas removed four Confederate statues from its Austin campus. It

followed one week after the Six Flags Over Texas amusement park announced it would stop displaying the Confederate flag, choosing instead to fly only the United States flag.

The actions followed deadly violence in Charlottesville, Va., where white nationalists and neo-Nazis protested the city's desire to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee, and they clashed with counter-protesters.

'We desire to do what is right'

The decision at Hardin-Simmons grew out of discussions involving the president, the board of trustees and the university's administrative leadership team regarding ways to encourage racial reconciliation.

In the process, university leaders examined "how the practice of using any flag of the Confederacy reflected misalignment with the university's history, core values and future goals," according to a statement from HSU. James B. Simmons, a Baptist pastor and abolitionist, founded the university in 1891.

"More than anything, we look to Scripture to inform us on how to live as faithful Christ-followers," Bruntmyer said. "We desire to do what is right—to be family together and good neighbors to all. We want to stand in unity with the image of God reflected in every person."