

RESOLUTION to the 2018 ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION

Resolution Relating to Support for the Elimination of Logos, Mascots, and Names Demeaning to Native Americans by Schools, Colleges, and Professional Sports teams. Presented by Eastern Pennsylvania Conference Committee on Native American Ministries (CoNAM)

WHEREAS, the members of the United Methodist Church approved at our General Conference in 2016, Resolution #3327 to Oppose Names Demeaning to Native Americans which reiterated The United Methodist Church publication Words That Hurt, Words That Heal, that emphasized the use of names and language is a powerful instrument for good as well as for destructive purposes. Moreover, that same conference approved Resolution, #3321 which rejects stereotypes and frames that depict American Indians in harmful or distorted ways. In addition, the United Methodist Book of Resolutions has contained statements as far back as 1992 that urged the denomination to repent for its role in the dehumanization and colonization of our Native American brothers and sisters. Accordingly, The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference held a Repentance Service in 2016 where we affirmed our calling to actively engage in the process of healing through listening and learning with Native Americans and to be the living and resurrected body of Christ in the world remembering that when one part is neglected or mistreated the entire body suffers.

WHEREAS, many of our churches have received copies of the mission study Giving Our Hearts Away: Native American Survival in which Dr. Thom White Wolf Fassett teaches us that, “Christians must speak a spiritual language quite different from the language of the politics of nation or state if we are to clearly identify with the images of love, justice and freedom that are central to the body of Christian teachings.” And further states, “We gain understanding through love and respect for one another and the living creation. Respect begins with reverence for God—the life that is within all things. And because all things are created by God, all are relatives and must be treated as family. Their health is our health. Our health is their health. God’s circle of creation must not be broken, for it symbolizes perfections, equality, unity, life and eternity.” (Fassett, 2008)

WHEREAS, there has been scientific research conducted to determine the harmful psychological effects these “Native” sports mascots on our Native youth; and according to studies conducted by Dr. Stephanie Fryberg and her colleagues, American Indian and Alaska Native high school and college students had a consistent, negative reaction with increased depression and lower self-esteem due to stereotypical mascots. (Fryberg, 2003) Because these images and names remind Native youth of the limited ways in which others see them, which in turn restricts how they see themselves; reducing them “into a single outdated stereotype that harms the way Native people, especially youth, view themselves.”(Hilleary, 2018.) Furthermore, the American Psychological Association has determined that these representations also undermine the ability of Native nations and people to portray themselves accurately as distinct and diverse cultures, and that stereotypical images are a dominant culture’s prejudiced representations of a racial or ethnic minority group; and research shows that these team names and mascots can establish an unwelcome and hostile learning environment for Native American students. These stereotypical representations are too often understood

as factual representations and thus “contribute to the development of cultural biases and prejudices.” (APA Resolution, 2011)

WHEREAS, our Native American youth are already at risk living at poverty levels at nearly double the national rate (Census, 2008-2010), with some of the lowest high school graduation rates in the country, (Center for Education Statistics, 2014) and extreme health disparities. (IHS, 2014) The most disturbing evidence of this is the suicide crisis which is the second leading cause of death for Native American youth ages 15 to 24 and at a rate that is 2.5 times higher than the national average. (CDC, 2012)

WHEREAS, after “animal” mascots, by far the next most popular athletic mascots are depictions of Native American people.” (King, 2001) And as of 2016, at least 12% of Pennsylvania (brick-and-mortar) public high school graduates come from a school with a demeaning mascot and of all 584 high school mascots identified, “Indians” was only second in popularity to “Panthers”, which were in 26 schools. (Goodman, 2016)

WHEREAS, there is a growing base of support calling for the elimination of Native logos, mascots, and names as evidenced by condemnation from national leaders, congressional members; professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association; education advocacy organizations, such as the National Education Association; human rights and tribal organizations, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Congress of American Indians; and sports regulatory commissions, like the National Collegiate Athletic Association; and

WHEREAS, Commission on General Conference moved our 2012 General Conference to Tampa Florida from Richmond Virginia when it discovered that city hosts the feeder team for the Richmond Braves. Additionally, Methodist schools have changed their names including, Simpson College, Oklahoma City University, and Martin Methodist College in opposition to such practices.

WHEREAS, Major teams and franchises are changing their names and team logos such as the University of North Dakota and the Cleveland Indians who will stop using the “Chief Wahoo” logo on their uniforms in 2019.

WHEREAS, major companies such as Adidas are helping to offset costs associated with such change by providing its "design services free of charge, subsidizing the cost of athletic equipment and providing additional financial support for the schools who want to make a change." (Mattera, 2015)

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that local CoNAM representatives partner with local churches and local Native American youth and parents, to study the impact, begin conversations about the consequences regarding the injurious nature of athletic programs that depict Native Peoples through logos, mascots, and names, as well as develop recommendations to remove harmful representations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in order to promote a safe and welcoming learning environment for all that local churches identify schools, colleges, and professional sports teams in their towns, municipalities, and counties which engage in practices of “Native” name-calling, mascotting and cultural appropriation, and urge them to change their team identities and behaviors.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that in the interest of furthering the conversation and continuing the Journey of Repentance the CoNAM acknowledges that some of the

names used by local schools and colleges are based on the language of the Native American Nations who first inhabited the land where they now reside. In light of this, we encourage local churches who are located near such schools and colleges to speak with these entities about engaging with Native youth and parents from the community and the schools in ways that are respectful of tribal culture and respects the right of each tribe and tribal community to decide how best to protect and celebrate Native heritage and traditions.

Person Responsible for Presenting Resolution: Rev. Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne