The Board of Directors recommends this resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

RESOLUTION TO CHANGE THE RACIALLY DEMEANING NAME, MASCOT, AND IMAGERY OF THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE TEAM

Submitted by Central Atlantic Conference
A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

This resolution primarily calls upon the Washington National Football League team to cease using the racially demeaning name of “Redskins,” its associated mascot, and its affiliated imagery. To bring pressure to bear upon both the Washington NFL team and the NFL itself on this issue, this resolution calls for – among other things – a United Church of Christ boycott of all Washington NFL games and merchandise unless and until the team’s name and logo changes. Secondarily, this resolution also asks the United Church of Christ “to call upon other sports teams to eradicate the use of names, images, mascots, and behaviors that are or could be properly deemed harmful or demeaning to Native American cultures or people.”

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

As illustrated by its first five WHEREAS clauses, the resolution is in keeping with the United Church of Christ’s theological self-understanding and historical self-identity as a prophetic, Just Peace Church that acts in word and deed against injustice anywhere and stands in solidarity with its victims everywhere. The resolution’s call to do away with racially demeaning names and imagery is a consistent application of the radically liberating implications of the apostle Paul’s insight that we are all “members one of another” and of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s dream of a beloved community, in which each person - regardless of race, color, or creed - is the benefactor and beneficiary of all people and so realizes his or her fullest potential as a human being; and, in particular, it is a concrete application of the UCC’s historical and historic stand to confront all types of discrimination generally and to condemn all forms of negative stereotyping of Native Americans specifically, as epitomized by its resolution to that effect at General Synod 18 (1991).

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As made clear in certain of its Resolved clauses, this resolution seeks to participate in the burgeoning national movement to change the name, associated mascot, and affiliated imagery of the Washington National Football League team by, among other things: [1] articulating lucidly
and proclaiming powerfully its position on this matter to the wider United Church of Christ (UCC); [2] calling upon the national setting of the United Church of Christ to communicate in writing that position to both the owner of the Washington NFL team and the commissioner of the NFL; [3] seeking to effect economic leverage by encouraging a denominational boycott of Washington NFL team games and merchandise; and [4] assisting the Oneida Indian Nation’s “Change the Mascot” campaign. Evaluation of this effort shall take place at least annually through a collaborative process developed in conjunction with tribal and other partners. The evaluation process shall be coordinated by the Executive Minister for Justice and Witness Ministries.

**INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

The United Church of Christ’s Justice and Witness Ministries have assumed historic leadership roles in addressing defamatory sports imagery. We anticipate that Justice and Witness will also assume such leadership for this important cause. In addition, the Central Atlantic Conference is willing to continue its efforts in this matter, in conjunction with Justice and Witness, the tribal representatives of the Oneida Indian Nation, other United Church of Christ Conferences, and other supporters of this effort.

**PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE**

“The Resolution to Change the Racially Demeaning Name of the Washington National Football League Team” – passed unanimously by the Central Atlantic Conference (CAC) at its June 2014 Annual Meeting and of which the resolution proposed herein is a slightly modified version – has already garnered significant public attention by major news outlets and publications (e.g., MSNBC, the Associated Press, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post*). In addition, momentum to bring pressure to bear on the Washington NFL team and the NFL itself regarding this issue is growing, not only from the public in general (as reflected in recent opinion polls) but also from an increasing number of sportscasters who refuse out of principle to refer to the team by its nickname. Moreover, a mounting chorus of governmental representatives and agencies have also rendered their judgment on this matter: fifty senators recently signed a letter petitioning NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell to remove the “racial slur” that characterizes Washington’s team name, and the U.S. PTO’s Trademark Trial and Appeal Board recently canceled the Washington NFL team’s trademark registration because of that team’s “disparaging” name and logo. The resolution proposed herein will allow the United Church of Christ once again – through its General Synod – to demonstrate its progressive leadership on social issues through its participation in the vanguard of a burgeoning national movement to end a significant symbol of racial discrimination in our nation’s very capital. In so doing, the national setting of the United Church of Christ will be enabled to speak with and to its various constituent churches on this
important matter and to proclaim to the country its solidarity with its beleaguered Native American brothers and sisters.

**TEXT OF THE MOTION**

WHEREAS, all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27);

WHEREAS, Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us (John 15: 12-17);

WHEREAS, Paul admonishes us to work for peace and mutual upbuilding (Romans 14: 18-19);

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ adopted at General Synod 18 (1991) a resolution condemning negative stereotyping of Native Americans;

WHEREAS, the use of racist imagery is an affront to basic human rights, undermines basic human dignity, and has a negative impact upon self image, self awareness, and self esteem;

WHEREAS, the use of racist language and stereotypes continues to exploit and degrade Native American culture;

WHEREAS, the abuse of Native American symbols, such as the headdress and sacred pipe, for entertainment and profit is insensitive, insulting, and an affront to Native American spirituality and is, therefore, unacceptable;

WHEREAS, not only many professional, semi-professional, amateur, collegiate, and high and grade school sports teams throughout the United States but also (and particularly egregiously) the highly visible professional football team located in our nation’s capital still employs racially derogatory and demeaning symbols, mascots, and names;

WHEREAS, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “redskin” as a “usually offensive” term to describe American Indians and this term, when used in reference to Native American cultures and people, has a history of use as a pejorative and insulting name;

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1 United Church of Christ General Synod 18 Resolution, July 1991, “Resolution: Negative Stereotyping of Native Americans.”
2 Ibid.
WHEREAS, the term “redskins” would not properly be used by a person when addressing a Native American and should not be used to market a professional sports team;

WHEREAS, the use of the term “Redskins” for the team mascot and nickname of the Washington National Football League team is offensive and hurtful to many Native Americans and causes direct harmful effects to the public health and well being of the Native American population; and

WHEREAS, every major Native American organization, along with hundreds of clergy, churches, civil rights organizations, media outlets, sports writers and journalists, authors and elected officials (including the President of the United States), has voiced support for changing the team name;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the National Football League’s Washington franchise to change its team name and to refrain from the use of any images, mascots, or behaviors that are or could be properly deemed harmful or demeaning to Native American cultures or peoples;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will communicate in writing this resolution to the owner of the Washington National Football League team, Daniel Snyder, and to the NFL Commissioner, Roger Goodell;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will communicate this resolution to the various conferences, affiliated and associated ministries, and instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ, and will proclaim it to the wider public through various social media;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that individual churches and members of the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ are urged to communicate their concerns regarding this matter to both the Washington National League Football team and the National Football League by writing to:

Daniel Snyder
Owner
Redsk*ns Park
21300 Redsk*ns Park Drive

Roger Goodell
Commissioner
National Football League
280 Park Avenue 15th Floor

4 “Resolution on the Washington, D.C. Football Team Name,” adopted December 12, 2013, by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (with the UCC as signatory).
5 Michael A. Friedman.
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that members and churches of the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ are urged to join a boycott of games played by the Washington National Football League team and not wear, display, or purchase any items with the Washington National Football League team logo until the name changes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ supports the Oneida Indian Nation’s “Change the Mascot” campaign and will contact its staff to determine the best means of support and solidarity; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon other sports teams to eradicate the use of names, images, mascots, and behaviors that are or could be properly deemed harmful or demeaning to Native American cultures or people.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

REFERENCES

United Church of Christ Eighteenth General Synod Resolution, July, 1991, “Resolution Negative Stereotyping of Native Americans”

“Negative Stereotyping As It Relates to the Native American Indian – A Position Paper for the United Church of Christ,” developed and published by the Racial Justice Program of the UCC Board for Homeland Ministries, Juanita Helphrey, Secretary for Racial Justice Programs, December 1, 1991

“No More Racist Sports Names!” by Juanita Helpfrey, November 2000, for United Church of Christ News


“Overture: Stereotyping Native American Names and Symbols,” by the Presbyterian Church (USA), to be presented at its June 14-21, 2014, General Assembly (following on its 1999 GA resolution that called attention to the stereotyping of Native Americans in U.S. culture)

“Resolution on the Washington, D.C. Football Team Name,” adopted December 12, 2013 by The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (with the UCC as signatory)

“Resolution Calling on the National Football League to End the Use of the Washington D.C. Racially Offensive Slur Team Mascot Name,” passed by the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) –[USET Resolution No. 2014:015 (October 31, 2013)]

ChangeTheMascot.org website of Oneida Nation and press releases

“Sacking the ‘Redsk*ns’: Just Because Racism is ‘Tradition’ Doesn’t Make it Right,” by Peggy Flanagan, Sojourners, February 2014, pp. 10-11