

# Overtures

to the 211th General Assembly (1999)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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*Overture 99-66. On the Negative Effects of Stereotyping Native Americans—From the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.*

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**The Presbytery of the Western Reserve overtures the 211th General Assembly (1999) to**

- 1. call upon governing bodies, congregations, and individuals to dialogue with one another and with Native American peoples about the effects of negative stereotyping and to learn about the positive history, culture, and spirituality, and current realities of Native American peoples;**
- 2. direct the Stated Clerk to write to professional teams, universities, colleges, and schools that use Native American imagery, expressing deep concern about the misuse of Native American names, images, and symbols, and urging them to develop a process to choose a new name, logo, and/or mascot for the team;**
- 3. direct the Stated Clerk to write to producers and manufacturers whose products use negative stereotypes of Native Americans, expressing deep concern about the misuse of Native American names, images, and symbols, and requesting that they refrain from using the stereotypes and find alternate ways to promoting their products;**
- 4. call upon individual Presbyterians to refrain from buying products that use negative stereotypes of Native Americans;**
- 5. direct the Stated Clerk to communicate this action to congregations and governing bodies for study and action.**

## *Rationale*

All human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and we who follow Jesus are called to love one another as he loves us (John 15:13–17).

"In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community" (*The Book of Confessions*, 10.3, lines 29–32).

The 161st General Assembly (1949) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America voted its support of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and General Assemblies since have consistently advocated the protection of the basic human rights for all people.

As people of the Word, we are challenged to be sensitive to the power of language and symbols, not only to reflect the world around us, but also to help us to shape that world.

The use of negative stereotypes in language, imagery, and symbols denies the image of God in human beings; undermines human dignity; has a negative impact upon self-image, self-awareness, and sense of human worth; and can foster an atmosphere in which hate grows, coming to expression in violence against individuals based on their innate characteristics.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has had a historic involvement in Native American ministries and has been an advocate for the rights of Native American people.

The abuse of Christian symbols, such as the cross and chalice, for entertainment and/or profit is insulting, insensitive, and an affront to Christian spirituality, and is, therefore, unacceptable.

The abuse of Native American symbols, such as the headdress, feathers, and sacred pipe, for entertainment and/or profit is insulting, insensitive, and an affront to Native American spirituality, and is, therefore, unacceptable.

The use of stereotypes and imagery as names and logos by professional, amateur, and school sports teams dehumanizes Native Americans.

Stereotypes keep society from really understanding who Native Americans really are. With the help of Wild Bill Hickock. While the days of the “wild west” were still being celebrated, they were putting children in boarding schools to deculturize them.

Custer’s image is pursued in American culture at the expense of Native Americans.

More:

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community - PCUSA

<https://fluxconsole.com/files/item/318/79356/PCUSA%20facing-racism.pdf>