

January 3, 2020

Marquette Area Public School Board
1201 West Fair Avenue
Marquette, MI 49855
schoolboard@mapsnet.org

Dear Marquette Area Public School Board Members:

Recently, the Marquette Senior High School Nickname Research Committee recommended changing the school's current mascot and nickname due to their objectifying and dehumanizing representations of Indigenous peoples.

On behalf of the Justice and Peace Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan, consisting of church members and other concerned citizens throughout the Upper Peninsula, we are writing to fully endorse the recommendation of the MSHS Nickname Research Committee to change the mascot and nicknames. The "Redmen" and "Redette" nicknames are not only hurtful to Indigenous members of the community, but to all who believe in human dignity, freedom and justice.

As stated in the committee's report, these nicknames have created an adverse learning environment for some MAPS students because the names are culturally insensitive, and they are not a source of pride for all MAPS students. We of The Episcopal Church we strive to live by our baptismal vows, which include, "respecting the dignity of every human being." It is not just Episcopalians; many faith traditions hold this value. Some call this the "Golden Rule" while others vow to "do no harm." When someone says that a term, a name, a practice, or an image is offensive or hurtful, it is not our place to question the validity of the claim. Rather, it is our responsibility to alleviate suffering, to tell the truth and to do the next right thing to repair breaches when they occur. In the current case, we are called to recognize an injustice, to educate each other about the nature of this injustice and to follow the lead of local Indigenous leaders who recognize how to heal this unnecessary trauma.

As we have begun to educate ourselves about the Indigenous communities throughout the Upper Peninsula, we are learning about the collective trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples over many generations and that contemporary issues of representation are more complex than many people realize or understand. Letting go of dehumanizing mascots is a proactive and positive step towards dealing with a painful history of colonization and inequities.

Removing impediments to relationship is a non-competitive act of reconciliation. Choosing transformation opens our eyes to the Jesus in all of us. This has been and will continue to be a challenging but not insurmountable process. We believe in a love that truly respects the dignity of each and every human being. In this case, honoring the findings of the MSHS Nickname Research Committee is a step on the road of reconciliation with our Native American family.

Thank you for the considerable time and energy that you have all put into thinking about the impacts of nicknames such “Redmen” and “Redettes” on the students and the community. Our hope is that the MSHS mascot and nicknames are changed soon as an important first step in educating one another about the history of the people whose lands we inhabit.

On behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan,

Sincerely,

Rayford J. Ray, Bishop