

Christmas wrappings: Name is racially charged

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The United Methodist Church will not hold its large 2012 General Conference in Richmond, Virginia, because the name of the city's minor league baseball team is racially charged, according to denominational officials.

Members of the planning commission for the every-fourth-year convention said they were unaware that the Virginia capital is home to the Richmond Braves—a team affiliated with the Major League Atlanta Braves—when they chose Richmond to host the meeting.

“When the minor league Braves issue was brought to our attention after the original announcement, we felt we were obligated to revisit the issue,” said Gail Murphy-Geiss, who chairs the commission responsible for planning the conference.

The Methodists now plan to hold the 2012 conference in Tampa, Florida. That city is home to the Tampa Bay Devil Rays major league baseball team and a minor league team, the Tampa Yankees. The pro football team is the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

The ten-day quadrennial convention, the Methodists' top legislative body, draws 1,000 delegates and an additional 4,000 nondelegates, family members and media representatives. It generates about \$20 million in spending. The 2008 meeting will be in Fort Worth, Texas.

At the 2004 conference in Pittsburgh, the delegates passed a resolution to avoid holding meetings and events in cities that sponsor sports teams brandishing Native American names and symbols, which the resolution called “a blatant expression of racism.”

The resolution was passed partly in response to controversy regarding the church's 2000 meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, home of the Cleveland Indians.

“We are sad for the United Methodists in Virginia who were excited about hosting the General Conference, but are pleased to take a strong stand against sports teams

with offensive names,” Murphy-Geiss said. -*Religion News Service*