

From: Trevor Nydam, President, Denver Christian Board of Trustees
To: Denver Christian Community
Date: May 4, 2016
Re: Mascot Change

Thank you to so many who have communicated thoughts, concerns and support regarding the decision to change our mascot. I would like to address some common and recurring questions about this process.

The decision process regarding the mascot change occurred over the last several years through ongoing discussions with our CEO and Superintendent Todd Lanting, the DC Board, and a formal focus group. Christian Reformed Church ministers from First and Third churches participated and agree with this decision. The decision process was consistent with the bylaws and governance policy of the school. The DC Board was and continues to be in unanimous support of this decision. Todd is one of many (board members, principals, coaches, athletic director, alumni, parents, and pastors) who spent many hours formally working through this decision with much prayer.

The weekly DC Newsletter has descriptions of the decision and voting process. This goes out to the DC community and anyone who signs up to receive it. If we have alumni contact info, they are included and have the option to opt-out. Until the last two years, DC had neglected to make any effort to maintain alumni contact information. After Todd was hired, he initiated the efforts to connect with the alumni and create a database. If alumni have not had significant interaction with the school for years, it has been difficult for us to get contact information. Communication with the alumni is a priority, but it has challenges.

DC's tradition is incredibly important to me. I dove on the floor after loose balls as a Crusader for Coach Katté with much pride. DC has made me who I am today. It did the same for both my brothers who are out in the world doing everything they can to be a Christ-like influence in their everyday lives. I understand how much this mascot can mean to alumni. Given my involvement with the school, as a volunteer and as a parent, I am also learning what the school needs to be a healthy, thriving, and sustainable Christian school in Denver. I love the school more than its mascot. I care more about its future than I do about my own memories of the past.

When I joined the Board three years ago, the school was bankrupt and about to close. The three campuses were in disrepair, requiring millions of dollars to bring up to grade. We were financing well over a million dollars of debt. We as the DC community and alumni share responsibility for this. The Superintendent turnover over the last two decades has been remarkable, with 10 different superintendents in 20 years. We need to have faith that God put these individuals in place for a reason, and we will continue to struggle if we do not empower them to do their job. We must remember to treat each other with respect during these processes.

In the past few years some bold decisions were made, including changing how the school is

governed and consolidating to one campus. We hired Todd and asked him to do the near impossible: solve the debt problem, balance the operational budget, increase enrollment, raise millions in a Capital Campaign, all the while supporting the culture of the school. With God's help, he has done everything we asked. We are incredibly grateful to Todd and the integral role he has played in keeping Denver Christian in existence, much less be the wonderful place it is today. We are finally thriving after years of hardship.

The Board continues to demand that Todd do *everything* possible to ensure we do not find ourselves in that situation again. This means ensuring everything about the school is in line with the DC Mission statement. We can debate the details of The Crusades. We can debate whether the current culture views The Crusades accurately. This misses the point. The Mission of Denver Christian is not to resolve this debate; it is to teach our current and future students to be a Christ-like influence in their everyday life. This inconsistency between our mission and our mascot is not something we the Board, Todd, and most current and future families want to see. The Crusades were hardly a Christ-like endeavor. This decision is the next step in doing everything we can to ensure another 100 years of excellence. Countless hours and an incredible amount of hard work, tears, and prayer have gone into each and every decision over the last few years.

This decision on the mascot is also true to Denver Christian's heritage. One leader in reformed education notes the following:

In order to encourage people to go on these crusades, the Church prior to the Protestant Reformation promised salvation for any who went on the crusades *and* forgiveness for any sins committed on the crusade. This gave the crusaders a free ticket to heaven and forgiveness without repentance. Clearly, this is a heretical doctrine and practice. Why would a school founded on a reformed perspective of life and learning want to celebrate this time of corruption in the Church?

Abraham Kuyper, a reformed educator, leader, and theologian, promoted a philosophy of "sphere sovereignty." In short, sphere sovereignty states that God has ordained certain institutions to rule in their own spheres, and when they try to operate outside of their sphere, they are ineffective and even sinful. The main spheres that he promoted were home, church and state. This philosophy encompassed all of life, but an example in regards to the crusades would be the church having an army. God has given the responsibility of an army, defense and war (among other things) to the state, not the church. Therefore, the church sending people on a military crusade doesn't fit into its proper sphere.

It is incorrect, therefore, to equate a repulsion of the crusades to being weak on the military or even the fight against ISIS. Rather, any repulsion of the crusades returns to the corruption found in the Church at that time ... usurping powers that have not been ordained by God to the sphere of the Church (or for that matter, the sphere of a Christian school).

We have strongly encouraged everyone not to engage in a public fight, as that only hurts DC. We as a school never proactively contacted the media or tried to recruit any media attention. 9News called us after receiving a tip about the story. We engaged with 9News in order to ensure that the rationale behind the mascot change was accurately portrayed.

We understand that change is difficult, and that grieving change is normal. We are saddened that some members of the community are upset. We pray for the ability to disagree peacefully and move forward together. Todd and any of the DC Board members will be happy to continue making time for anyone in the DC community who wants to talk further.

In His Grip,

Trevor Nydam
President, Denver Christian Board of Trustees
Class of 1991

P.S. While the November 2015 decision to change the mascot has recently received criticism, many more have greeted this change with great enthusiasm, and I want to share just a few, representative comments we have received in support:

"My two daughters go to Denver Christian and I just wanted to reach out and thank you for everything you're doing for the school. Our family supports the decision to change the mascot. While we can understand the concerns from some alumni about this, we do not support our school standing for anything but love and kindness. Whatever people believe about the history of 'Crusader,' unfortunately some connotations aren't something DC should stand for now or in the future." - **DC Parent**

"I do not think we need a mascot that causes offense. *So I want to express gratitude and affirmation about your recent decision to change the mascot.* I know my voice is only one in the midst of many communications you will surely receive, and I hope I am not alone in expressing my affirmation of your decision. I do know that I am not alone in my opinion; I hope others share their affirmation too." – **DC Alum**

"It comes up in conversations with new and old friends. 'What was your school mascot?' My answer, however, always begins with a slight cringe. I was a Denver Christian Crusader. Without delving into a long, drawn-out history lesson, the crusades were religious, bloody battles that occurred centuries ago. The crusades involved pillaging cities of innocent victims and waging war over land that ended in over a million people dead across a continent. Many associate the word 'Crusader' with hate. I attended Denver Christian Schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. My entire family went to DC as far back as my grandmother. Whether it was in a classroom or out on a field, I received an education that drove me through college to become a distinguished graduate in my concentration. That education was one based on love and positivity. At track meets, we couldn't leave until the last teammate was cheered across the finish line. In the classroom, we had to work together to find the answer. We weren't spurred

on by animosity or condemnation. We were empowered by teachers who truly loved to teach, who truly loved us. Changing the mascot isn't for the students, families and teachers who have been and are a part of Denver Christian - they know about the rich community found on Teller Street. The mascot change should be for those who drive past every day and associate the word 'Crusader' with negativity. Brené Brown speaks on vulnerability in her book *Rising Strong* and quotes, 'Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the muscle.' It is my hope that with a positive mascot behind the name 'Denver Christian' the knowledge of love, teamwork and sportsmanship can live in the muscles of the Denver community." – **DC Alum**

"Just wanted to thank you for all you do for the school and our children. You, and the entire staff and board have been in my thoughts and prayers.... I really appreciate you and everyone else at the school and the contributions to my children's education and upbringing. You are all doing an excellent job." - **DC Parent**

"We love DC and are in it for the long haul! No name change, color change, song change, building change or carpet change will misdirect us from the truth -- DC has an amazing, powerful, Holy Spirit inspired staff and faculty – it's where we want to be and where we want our kids!" – **DC Parent**

"I just wanted to send a quick note to say how much I appreciated the channel 9 news segment about Denver Christian last night. Not only did you express a more progressive and very reformed viewpoint, but you also showed love, empathy & a willingness to evolve. Although our kids don't currently attend Denver Christian, we are still very invested in Christian education & wish you all the best!" - **Past DC Parent**

"I just wanted you to know how supportive I am of this decision. I also wanted you to know how thankful I am for your unified voice on this decision and the support of Todd and the school's leadership. The unity on this decision is also found throughout the staff. The entire administrative team, and every teacher/staff member that I've talked with is supportive of the mascot change." – **DC Administrator**