

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 23 November 2013*

Dear Members of the European Olympic Committee, Good morning!

I am delighted to welcome you on the occasion of your Assembly. In particular, I greet your President and the President of the International Committee, and I thank them for their words. Through you, I would like to express my appreciation to all those who, at the European level, are committed to fostering human development and social brotherhood through sports.

The bond between the Church and the world of sports is a beautiful reality that has strengthened over time, for the Ecclesial Community sees in sports a powerful instrument for the integral growth of the human person. Engaging in sports, in fact, rouses us to go beyond ourselves and our own self interests in a healthy way; it trains the spirit in sacrifice and, if it is organized well, it fosters loyalty in interpersonal relations, friendship, and respect for rules. It is important that those involved at the various levels of sports promote human and religious values which form the foundation of a just and fraternal society. This is possible because the language of sports is universal; it extends across borders, language, race, religion and ideology; it possesses the capacity to unite people, together, by fostering dialogue and acceptance. This is a very valuable resource!

I wish to encourage institutions and organizations like your own to propose, especially to the younger generations, sports initiatives as a formation for peace, sharing and coexistence among peoples. Sporting events are characterized by unity and not division! Build bridges, not walls. The five interlocking rings, the symbol and standard of the Olympic Games, are meant precisely to represent the spirit of brotherhood that must characterize the Olympics and competitive sports in general.

When sports is considered only within economic parameters or for the sake of victory at any cost, one runs the risk of reducing athletes to mere merchandise for the increasing of profit. These same athletes enter into a system that sweeps them away, they lose the true meaning of their activity, the joy of playing that attracted them as children and that inspired them to make many real sacrifices and become champions. Sport is harmony, but if the excessive quest for money and success prevails, that harmony is broken.

You, as Olympic officials, are called to foster the role of education in sports. Let us all be aware of the great necessity to form athletes in righteousness, moral rigor and a keen sense of responsibility.

I express to you all my sincere best wishes for your work and I invoke the Lord's blessing upon you, your families and those who will take part in the next Olympic Games and in your other initiatives. Thank you.

Now I would like to give to you all, to all those whom you represent, and to the whole of the sports world, to those preparing for the next Olympic Games, the Lord's blessing. For all of us, may it be a blessing full of grace and full of love. Let each of us pray to the Lord asking him for this blessing. May the Lord bless you and protect you. Amen!

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