

Dicastery for



Laity Family and Life

Giving the Best of yourself

A document about the Christian perspective on sport and the person

DICASTERY FOR LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE

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A document about the Christian perspective
on sport and the human person



Summary

- 1 What is the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life?
- 2 Why an office for sports in the Vatican?
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Whether you eat, drink, or anything you do, do it for the glory of God!

In the exercise of his task at the service of the Church throughout the world, the Pope is assisted by a **series of bodies brought together under the name of Roman Curia.**

The DLFV is divided in 3 sections:

1. Section for the Laity (youth office, women office, movements, children, sports office, legal office, etc...)
2. Section for the Family
3. Section for Life



What is the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life?

The Dicastery for the Laity is directed by a **Prefect**, and assisted by a **Secretary** and 2 **under-secretaries**, nominated by the Pope.

The Prefect is His Eminence Card. Kevin Farrell, who was previously Bishop of Dallas, USA. The Secretary is a Brazilian priest, Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello.

Prof. Linda Ghisoni is the under-secretary for the Laity, and Prof. Gabriella Gambino is the under-secretary for Family and Life.

In the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life there are currently **36 people (19 men and 17 women)** from 12 different countries, most of them being lay people.



Why is there an office **for sports** in the **Vatican**?

The history of the Church and Sport office starts at the Jubilee of 2000; while there were many other initiatives that took place in Rome, there was also the Jubilee of sports. There Saint John Paul II asked to create an office inside the Vatican to take care of athletes and to evangelize the world of sports. He was again *a prophet for his time*, like with many other issues in the Catholic Church.

Thus, after some research **in 2004**, the office was established within the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

The first to be responsible of the office was the American priest Kevin Lixey LC, a former American football player. In June 2004, he put the Sport office into motion. It was to be a sort of “observatory of the Holy See” that would be **a point of reference** for international Catholic sports associations **and for research on the vast world of sport**.



The Church & Sport office in the DLFV

The Church & Sport office was created to:

- 1) **be a point of reference** in the Church for national and international sport organizations;
- 2) increase local church awareness of the **importance of the pastoral ministry of sports environments**, while encouraging cooperation between Catholic sports associations;
- 3) **foster a sports culture**, as a means of bringing about the holistic growth of the person at the service of peace and brotherhood between peoples;
- 4) **promote the study** of specific issues relating to sport, particularly from an ethical point of view;
- 5) **organize and support initiatives** that encourage the Christian witness by sportsmen and sportswomen.



Competences of the Church & Sport office

The Church and Sport office has competence to **represent the Holy See in all of the international sport agencies**. From the International Olympic Committee, **or** the international sports federations, to associations and institutions dedicated to fostering and promoting the sport at all levels.

It collaborates with the **spiritual care of athletes and fans** at major international events like the Olympic Summer and Winter Games, Paralympic Games, Special Olympics, etc...

The Vatican brings its expertise **in teaching values** and in promoting Christian faith through sport, to the success of the projects globally undertaken.

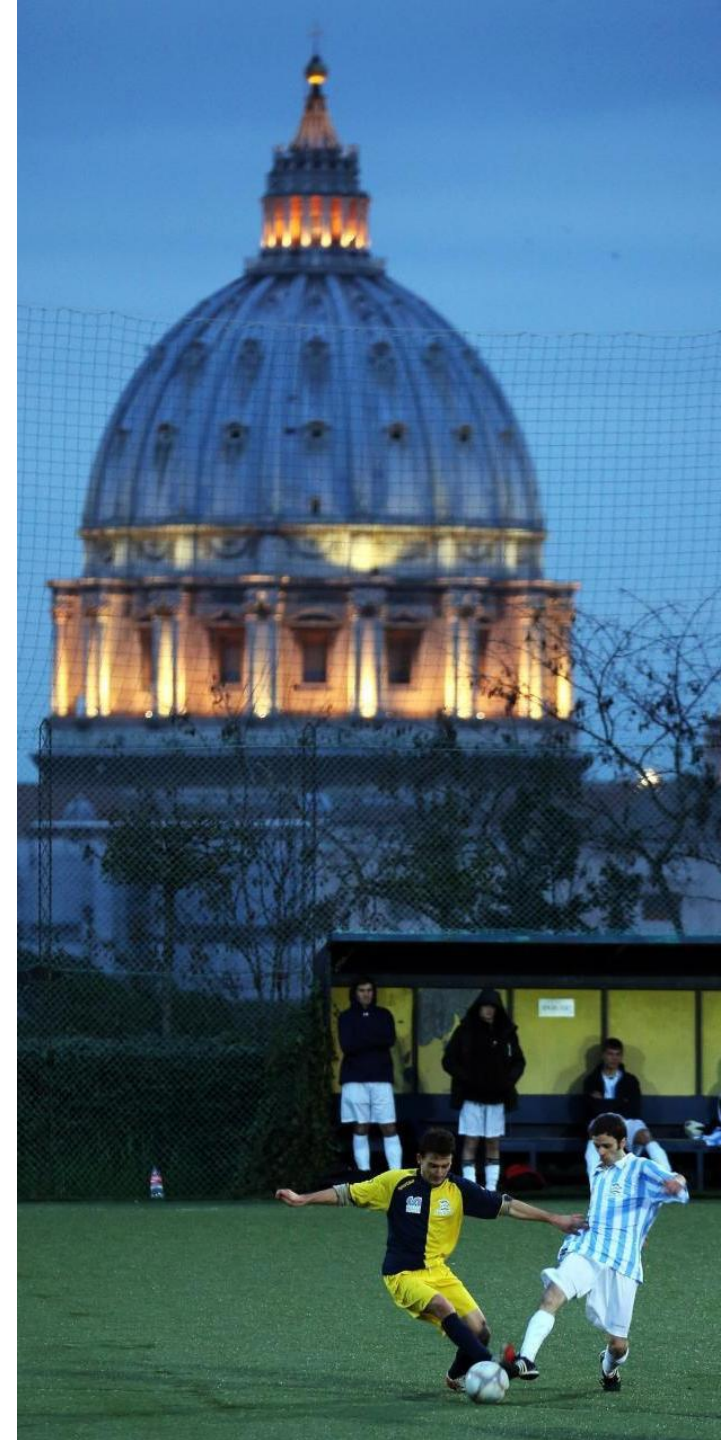


Broad outlines of the Church & Sport office

Also within its tasks is the **study and promotion of values in sport, and in society through sport.**

To achieve this, **four international seminars** have been organized to take a deeper look into the value of sport in society and as a way of evangelization.

1. The world of sport today: a field of Christian mission. (2005)
2. Sport, an educational and pastoral challenge. Sports Chaplains. (2007)
3. Sport, education, faith: towards a new season for Catholic sports associations. (2009)
4. Training athletes, educating people. The role of coaches in the 21st Century. (2015)



Giving the Best of Yourself

First official document of the Holy See on sport.

11 members from all over the world and with a specific background in sports were part of the review of the draft.

5 CHAPTERS

- 1** Motives and purpose of the document
- 2** The sport phenomenon
- 3** Significance of sports for the person
- 4** Challenges in the light of the Gospel
- 5** The Church as a key protagonist



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Motives and purpose of this document

- To describe the **relationship between sport and the experience of faith.**
- To offer a **Christian vision of the practice of sport.**
- To call to mind the effort and sacrifice that an athlete must undergo to obtain victory or simply to arrive at a goal, as in the sphere of faith we are similarly called to give the best of ourselves to reach sanctity.
- To reflect upon the state of sport today to help the Episcopal Conferences and dioceses in the **development of a pastoral mission in sports.**
- To help amateur clubs, associations, and individual athletes to reflect upon Christian life and on the way to practice sport.

First document of the Holy See about sports: Prior to this document, there was no document that discussed the thoughts and desires of the Catholic Church with regard to the practice of sport, be it at a professional or amateur level.



The Sport Phenomenon

The term *sport* stems from the Old French expression *desporter* or *se desporter*, a derivate of the Latin word *de(s)portare*, meaning **to amuse oneself**.

It would be helpful to know **how sport acquired its current shape** or what its **main characteristics** are. Further, it will be good to take note of **its various relations with the wider societies** of which it is a part.

The genesis of modern sport

Pope John Paul II designated sport as a “typical phenomena of the modern era [...] a ‘sign of the times’ capable of interpreting **humanity’s new needs and new expectations.**”



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What is sport? *Sports are bodily motions of individual or collective agents who, in accordance with particular rules of the game, effect ludic performances which, on the condition of equal opportunity, are compared to similar performances of others in a competition.*

- 1) The concept of sport is associated with the **human body in motion**.
- 2) Sport is a **ludic activity**.
- 3) Sport is normally subjected to certain **rules**.
- 4) Sport has a **competitive** character.
- 5) If sport is actually a competition regulated by particular rules of the game, then the **equality of opportunities** has to be warranted.

Sport is **not only an activity on its own**, but also has an **exterior**.



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The contexts of sport

The sport system

On a greater level of sports, e.g. the highly organized Olympic Games, a **sports jurisdiction** has to be established, doping monitoring programs have to be run or great sport events have to be arranged. To generate the required resources to facilitate these tasks, the sport system needs **external benefactors**, e.g., voluntary workers, political supporters, financial donors, customers.

This **structural dependence** of the sport system, as we might call it, explains why this system has to constantly make known the attractiveness of sport to external contributors. This, however, entails presenting sport in a way that fits with the various interests of the potential benefactors. And so, **sport becomes a kind of product which promises to satisfy the interests of various individuals, groups, and institutions.**

If politicians are willing to invest public money into the sport system because it promises to improve the population's health or the holistic education of children and young people, then it is not wrong if the sport system presents a sport, which serves just these purposes. However, if, for instance, a greater amount of resources can be generated by making the sport system dependent on the economic system or on ideological systems, then the inclination will be high to do exactly this, even if the purposes thus served are ethically dubitable or inhuman.



Significance of Sports for the Human being

Body, soul, spirit

A unified view of the human being

According to John Paul II, the Church regards sport with esteem because she values “everything that contributes to the **harmonious and complete development of the person, body and soul**. She encourages, therefore, what aims at educating, developing and strengthening the human body, in order that it may offer a better service for the attainment of personal maturity.”



Freedom, rules, creativity and cooperation

Nowadays, many people believe that freedom is doing what one wants, without any limits. Such a view decouples freedom and responsibility and may even eliminate regard for the consequences of human acts. However, sport reminds us that **to be truly free is also to be responsible.**

“Throwaway culture”**In sports the rules do not limit human creativity but encourage it.**

To achieve his objectives within the established norms, the athlete has to be very creative. He must seek to surprise the competitor with a new or unexpected trick or strategy. For this reason, creative athletes are highly valued.



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Fair play

There is an increasing awareness of the need for fair play in sport.

Athletes honor fair play when they not only **obey the formal rules** but also **observe justice** with respect to their opponents so that all competitors can freely engage in the game.

This includes not using hidden strategies, such as doping, to have an illicit advantage over competitors.

Individualism and team

Nowadays, we can see many manifestations of individualism. Sport is **a school of teamwork that helps us overcome selfishness**. In it the individuality of each player is related to the team that works together toward achieving a common goal.



Sacrifice

The athletes must subject themselves to discipline and focus on the task at hand if they are to learn and acquire the necessary skill. To achieve this it often means that the person has to follow a regular and structured program.

John Paul II, on the value of sacrifice in sport, says: “This is **the logic of sport**, especially Olympic sports; it is also the **logic of life: without sacrifices, important results are not obtained, or even genuine satisfaction.**”

These encounters with sacrifice in sport can help athletes form their characters in a particular way. They can develop the virtues of courage and humility, perseverance and fortitude.

Both the Church and the real world of sport commonly use the term sacrifice in a very direct and specific way.



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Joy

Since the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport in 1978, sport has become a right for all to participate, not just the young, healthy and able-bodied. Regardless of whether sport is practiced by children, the elderly, or people with disabilities, **sport brings joy to all who freely participate in it, at all levels of play.**

Many people participate in sport merely to enjoy the sensation of bodily movement, the opportunity to socialize with others, to learn a new skill, or to feel a sense of belonging. Joy in these contexts is the by-product of doing something we love or enjoy. **We see that ultimately joy is a gift, and that it is always grounded in love,** and that this formula applies at all standards of sport. This link of joy with love in sport, therefore, has important truths to teach us about the relationship between God, love and joy in our spiritual lives.

Nevertheless, **for the committed athlete, the moments of joy in sport are usually encountered alongside suffering or sacrifices** of one sort or another, and after great mental and physical effort.



Harmony

The harmonious development of the person **must always be at the forefront of all who have responsibility for sport**, be they coaches, instructors or administrators. Harmony refers to balance and well-being and is essential to experience true happiness.

Courage

St. Thomas Aquinas has taught that courage represents a mean point between cowardice on the one hand and recklessness on the other. And the Church has insisted that **the courageous act is always related to morality**.



Equality and respect

The **equality of rights for every individual does not mean uniformity or similarity**. On the contrary, because it also means **respect for the multiplicity and diversity of human life** with respect to sex, age, cultural backgrounds or traditions.

It is understandable that there are specific differences of age in sports performance categories or that in most sports disciplines men and women do not compete against each other. With all the attention on the multiplicity of conditions, talents and abilities, **different categories of performance must not lead to hidden ranks or hierarchy of classifications or even to the airtight delimitation between different human groups**.



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Equality and respect

Sport is an activity that can and should promote the equality of human beings. “The Church considers sports as an instrument of education when they foster high human and spiritual ideals and when they form young people in an integral way to develop in such **values as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, solidarity and peace.**”

There are many examples of how **sport produces unity in society and equality between people.** Many popular sports have campaigned against racism and have promoted peace, solidarity and inclusion. “Sports can bring us together in the spirit of fellowship between peoples and cultures. Sports are indeed a sign that **peace is possible.**”



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Solidarity

Athletes, especially those who are most renowned, have an unavoidable social responsibility. It is important that they have more and more awareness of their role with respect to solidarity and that this be noticed in society: “You, the players, are exponents of a sports activity, which every weekend brings together so many people in the stadiums and to which social media devotes large spaces. For that reason, you have a special responsibility.” (Pope Francis)

“Put your talents at the service of the encounter between persons, of friendship, of inclusion.” (Pope Francis)

Sport must always go hand in hand with solidarity, because sporting activity is called upon to radiate the most sublime values throughout society, especially the promotion of the unity of people, races, religions and cultures, thus helping to overcome many divisions that our world still experiences today.



Sport reveals the quest for ultimate meaning

Sport respects human freedom in that within the confines of a specific set of rules, it does not prevent creativity but rather fosters it. Thus the experience of being freely oneself is not lost.

In the modern world, sport is perhaps the most striking example of the unity of body and soul. A one-sided interpretation of sport leads to a false notion of the human being. Only focusing on strength, for instance, might suggest that humans are self-sufficient beings.

Through sport human beings can experience beauty. As Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly pointed out, the aesthetic faculty of the human being is also a decisive characteristic which stimulates the quest for ultimate meaning. If such an integral anthropological view is applied, then sport can indeed be seen as an extraordinary field where the human being experiences some significant truths about him- or herself on his or her quest for ultimate meaning.

Ultimate meaning from a Christian point of view

Although it is true that sport embodies the pursuit of a certain kind of happiness, it is also true that we were created for a happiness that is greater still. This happiness is made possible by the free gift of God's grace.



Challenges in the Light of the Gospel

A humane and just sport

Promotion of human values in sport

When the rules of sport are agreed upon at an international level, athletes from different cultures, nations and religions are allowed to have a **shared experience of fair competition and joy, which can help foster the unity of the human family.**

People can experience their embodied existence in a simple and positive way. By playing on a team, athletes recognize that the most satisfying experiences occur when the players have a strong bond with one another and play well together.

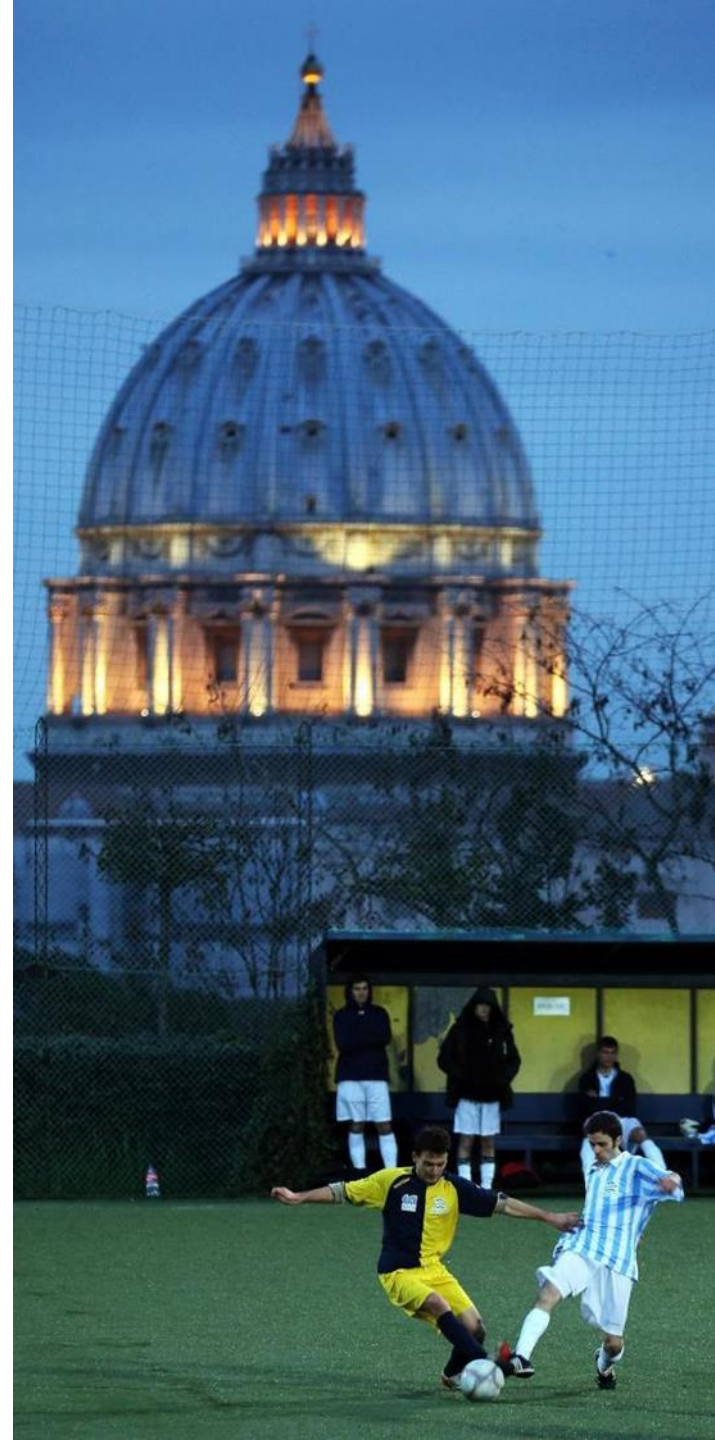


Criticism for wrong directions

The Church's social doctrine always reminds us that persons involved in politics, economics, or science must ask themselves whether or not their actions serve the human person and a just order. Persons involved in sport must also face this question.

But **the economic aspect must not prevail over that of the sport**, [when it does so] it risks contaminating everything on the international, national, and even local level.

“When sports are 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.



Shared responsibility for good sport

Not only do participants or athletes have responsibility but also many other people, such as families, coaches and assistants, doctors, managers, spectators and persons connected with sports in other sectors, including sports scientists, political business leaders and media representatives.

Any kind of disparagement or violence is to be condemned and those responsible for the sport must do all they can to counter it.

The **social importance and moral responsibility** of various sports organizations at regional, national and international levels are considerable; thus, they must serve the internal goods of sport and the good of the human person.



Four specific challenging developments

- 1) The debasement of the body
- 2) Doping
- 3) Corruption
- 4) Spectators

The more the various agents involved in sporting events insist on ever greater performances or **“winning at all costs,”** then the more there is excessive pressure on sportspeople and the more they look for **morally dubious ways to enhance performance.**



The Church as a key protagonist

- 1) The Church is at home in sport
- 2) Sport is at home in the Church
- 3) Environments of sport pastoral ministry
- 4) Take care of sport pastoral workers
- 5) Some fundamental elements for pastoral planning through sport



1) The Church is at home in sport

The Church does not avoid the co-responsibility for development of sport and its fate. She actively seeks to improve sports practices, systems and procedures through collaborative partnerships with sports organizations.

The Church has an organized and institutional presence in the world of sport that allows her to promote a Christian vision of sport, through various forms at various levels. Within its own organizational structures, the Holy See has different bodies interested in the sporting phenomenon which follow and promote sport from an institutional, pastoral and cultural point of view.

While the Church welcomes everyone to itself, she also goes out into the world. As Pope Francis says, **“the way of the Church, is precisely to leave her four walls behind and to go out in search of those who are distant, those on the ‘outskirts’ of life.”**



2) Sport is at home in the Church

Sport and Catholic education

Since the origins of Christianity, sport has emerged as an effective metaphor of the Christian life.

There are possibilities of introducing sports, games and other playful activities in order to lead young persons toward a deeper understanding of the scriptures, Church teachings or sacraments.

When sport is lived in a way that respects the dignity of the person and is free from economic, media or political exploitation, it can become a model for all areas of life.

Sport is also a way to **introduce young people to the cardinal virtues** of fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice and facilitate their growth in them.

For St. John Bosco, probably the first Catholic educator to have recognized the importance of sport for the holistic development of the personality of young people, **educating through sport means to cultivate the personal accompaniment of the young person as well as mutual respect, even in competition.**



Sport to create a culture of encounter and peace

In the world of sports, the Church can play a significant role by helping to build bridges, open doors and promote common causes – permeating societies like ‘leaven.’

Sport as a work of mercy

There are many international sport governing bodies, private institutions and nonprofit organizations that promote and use sports as a positive tool of engagement among youth and teens who live in environments susceptible to gang violence, drug abuse and trafficking.

Sport to create a culture of inclusion

Because there are human goods associated with sports, **all who desire to participate should be able to do so.** This is especially true for poor or displaced children, physically or intellectually disabled persons, the homeless and refugees.

In some parts of the world, girls and women are denied the right to participate in sports and thus cannot experience the joy and benefits of participation and competition with respect for one’s opponent and oneself.



3) Environments of sport pastoral ministry

Parents as first teachers

Sports are often a source of bonding between a parent and child. This bond allows parents to educate their children about virtues and the human values inherent to sports.

If sport runs the risk of being the occasion to divide a family and to diminish the sanctity of Sunday as a holy day to uphold, it also can help integrate a family with other families in the celebration of Sunday, not only in the liturgy but in the life of the community.

Any genuine human reality is definitely bound to be reflected within the Church.

Priests should be encouraged to be reasonably knowledgeable about contemporary sports realities and trends, especially as they affect youth, and to link sports with faith in homilies when it makes sense.



Schools and universities are ideal places to promote an understanding of sport aimed at education, inclusion and human promotion. This context presents a wonderful opportunity for the Church to dialogue with those who have a specific responsibility to educate present and future sport leaders as they help develop sport in a way that serves the human person and the building of a just society.

Amateur sports clubs and associations

Coaches and sports managers have great influence over their athletes, so a pastoral and educational action requires an alliance with them.

Professional sport is a phenomenon able to deeply influence not only youth and amateur sport, but the lifestyle of a whole society. The Church should **develop appropriate pastoral plans for the accompaniment of players and athletes**, many of whom hold considerable influence in the sporting world and the world at large. The Church should **accompany athletes on their personal journey**, supporting them in understanding and enhancing their responsibility to be heralds of humanity. The Church, along with leaders of other religious traditions, can help to **remind people to keep sport in perspective**. While play and sport are good and meant to be pursued with passion and enjoyed, they are not the most important thing in life.



Media as a bridge

It is imperative that the Church respond in a meaningful way to sporting events and issues. In fact, the faithful are seldom aware that the Church accepts and perceives sports in a positive way.

Specialized sciences

The Church's conversation with other sciences such as the life sciences, cultural or social sciences can also offer significant insights into sports and the ways in which they can become a beneficial lifelong activity.

The new places of sport

Beyond traditional sporting places, attention must also be paid to non-formal places where people, especially young people who reject organized and codified contexts, practice new kinds of street sports.

It is now essential to take an active dialogue with sports media and e-sports.



4) Take care of sport pastoral workers

Sport educators

When it comes to sports, coaches, referees, teachers and managers play a significant role in the attitudes of players or athletes.

A pastoral plan for sports training agencies can involve materials, one-on-one interactions and highly specialized workshops for sports coaches that will involve guidance on a spiritual/ecclesial level, empowering them to be witnesses, “to proclaim Jesus Christ by one’s words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world.”

Family and parents

It is important for families to know and share educational and pastoral goals. This does not mean that the sport proposal should be a confessional proposal, but it certainly cannot be a neutral proposal from the point of view of values. It is therefore essential to create moments of meeting and discussion with parents.



Priests and consecrated people

The pastoral presence of priests and consecrated people in the realm of sports must demonstrate their role of facilitating the educational purpose of sport and of spiritually accompanying the athletes. This role cannot be articulated in abstract “intellectual” terms detached from daily life.

It is important that the pastoral care of sport be included in the formation of candidates for the priesthood and that they have the opportunity to practice sport while in the seminary.



5) Some fundamental elements for pastoral planning through sport

Sport to rebuild the educational pact

To have a concrete impact, **a project of pastoral care of sport must be a network project** with local educational agencies, starting with families, schools and public institutions.

It is not enough to delegate the educational responsibility to people who work in silos with no relation to each other.

Play as the basis of sport

As Pope Francis put it, **“It is important that sports remain a game!”** Only by remaining a game will it do good for the body and spirit.”

“Rediscover play as a learning experience, as an educational experience, so that education will no longer be merely information, but creativity at play. **Rediscover this playful aspect which enables us to grow in creativity and in joint work.**”



Teamwork against individualism

To belong to a sports club means to reject every form of individualism, selfishness and isolation, and gives “an opportunity to encounter and be with others, to help one another, to compete in mutual esteem and to grow in brotherhood.”

Sport for all

Sport has to reject a throwaway culture and has to be open, welcoming and inclusive. **“Everyone gets to play,** not just the best, with the advantages and the limitations that each has, indeed, **focusing on the disadvantaged, as Jesus did.”**

An ecological vision of sport

While the technological and digital revolutions have brought many benefits to humanity and it is right to celebrate these, the current dominant technological paradigm also has negative impacts. Sport in this context can be counter-cultural in that it provides young people with the opportunity for face-to-face encounter with other youth, who at times have very different backgrounds from their own. Such **encounters can help young people to realize that they are a part of something larger than themselves, a part of what gives meaning and purpose to their lives.**



Conclusive Remarks

Pope Francis encourages us today to **give the very best of ourselves**, not only in sport, but in the rest of our lives as well: “As sportsmen, I invite you not only to play, like you already do, but there is something more: **challenge yourself** in the game of life like you are in the game of sports. Challenge yourself in the quest for good, in both Church and society, **without fear, with courage and enthusiasm**. Get involved with others and with God; **don’t settle for a mediocre ‘tie’, give it your best, spend your life on what really matters and lasts forever.**”





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