



**SPORT at the
SERVICE OF
HUMANITY**
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Sport at the Service of Humanity Vatican Follow-up Conference at Villanova University Explores Faith and Sport at the Collegiate Level

Growing Vatican movement continued in conversation around collegiate sports

Working group initiative established to develop additional strategies for collegiate sports aimed at fulfilling the Vatican's six Principles for "Sport at the Service of Humanity"

VILLANOVA, Pa.—Vatican officials along with leaders in the world of higher education and college athletics joined together at Villanova University June 7-8 for the first follow-up conference on the Vatican's "Sport at the Service of Humanity" initiative. The conference was the first to be sanctioned by the Vatican following its inaugural conference on faith and sports in Rome in October 2016.

Sport at the Service of Humanity: A Regional Conference on Faith and Collegiate Sports—hosted by Villanova University's Office of Mission and Ministry in conjunction with the BIG EAST Conference—was an invitation-only event with participants consisting of athletic leadership, coaches, team chaplains, campus ministers and mission and ministry officers from colleges and universities, including many faith-driven institutions. Representatives from 28 colleges and universities took part in the conference, in addition to participants from other organizations including the International Olympic Committee.

At the conclusion of the event, conference leadership committed to establishing a working group to build upon the "Sport at the Service of Humanity" initiative at the collegiate level. The working group will focus on efforts that can be made at colleges and universities to fulfil the six Principles—joy, compassion, respect, enlightenment, love and balance—established by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture. Further discussion around this topic will continue this fall with additional programming, in collaboration with the BIG EAST Conference.

"We welcome this chance to engage other higher education leaders on how faith and sports can bring people together," said the Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, Villanova University President. "Few activities have the power to unite people from all walks of life like sports. At the end of the day, sports unite us. It cuts across race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Every one of us has the opportunity to be transformed by sport and to transform others through it."

The Sport at the Service of Humanity initiative was created by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture and built around the "Declaration of Principles": joy, compassion, respect, enlightenment, love and balance. The inaugural conference, held at the Vatican on October 5-7, 2016, included two days of intensive discussion among religious leaders, athletes, business leaders, academicians, media representatives and other stakeholders, with a focus on how sport and faith can drive positive social change and foster inclusion, involvement and inspiration among people from diverse backgrounds.

"Sport is a universal language that speaks to people around the world. In a divisive and polarized world, sport can create bridges and mutual understanding," said Bishop Paul Tighe, who delivered a conference keynote address titled, *The Church's Aspirations for Sports at the Service of Humanity*. "There are certain basic goods that belong to all humanity. Sport is one of those good things and making sport available to all is a question of justice."

Monsignor Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, has been one of the driving forces behind “Sport at the Service of Humanity.” He sees the initiative as a growing movement—a vehicle and median for changing the world. While the world of faith and sport rarely touch each other, he believes they can learn from each other and together can make a positive impact on society.

“Faith communities and sport organizations both share a common purpose in the promotion of human values, and both have vital, but different, roles to fulfil,” said Monsignor Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda. “Both are powerful platforms, both have strong messages, and both have their own set of challenges. However, usually, these two worlds rarely touch each other. Yet they have a lot to learn from each other; our communities can benefit from the many values sport embodies—sacrifice, discipline, team work. Sport is a medium to teach all people in every society to play together so that they can live together in peace and harmony.”

The Pontifical Council on Culture seeks to bring the six Principles to life through three key areas of engagement:

- **Inspiration:** expanding the geographic reach of the Faith and Sport movement through conferences, like the one at Villanova University, and facilitating ongoing multi-faith, multi-cultural, multi-sector dialogue.
- **Involvement:** identifying partnering programs and organizations that can integrate the Principles into existing initiatives and/or to develop new programs based on shared values and objectives that have long-lasting impact and legacy.
- **Inclusion:** community engagement, which currently consists of developing toolkits for grassroots engagements to be distributed to schools, community organizations, youth sport leagues, clubs, teams, churches, mosques, and parishes.

This week’s conference at Villanova further increased the geographic reach of the movement and brought the conversation into a new area of exploration: collegiate athletics.

Before sending conference participants into discussion groups to further dissect college athletics and ways in which programs can align their own activities and resources more firmly at the “service of humanity,” BIG EAST Conference Commissioner Val Ackerman discussed the importance of delivering student-athletes a holistic college athletics experience during a keynote address. Ackerman, who was a delegate at the inaugural Vatican conference and served on an advisory committee assembled to develop the framework and content for the event, stressed the importance that academics, spirituality and community, in addition to athletics should have in the personal development of young people in the university setting.

“Athletics at the university level are a means to an end—one stepping stone on the path to a better self, capable of enriching the world,” said Ackerman. “If approached holistically, intercollegiate athletics programs are an ideal platform to build character and teach values, goals that can be subordinated amidst the quest to win championships or maximize commercial rewards.”

Ackerman added: “If coaches and administrators could find new ways to restore fun and joy to sports activities, our student-athletes would only gain.”

Keynote speaker Rev. Pat Kelly, SJ, Theologian and author from Seattle University, shared Ackerman’s sentiments on the role college athletics programs must play: “Our task is to incarnate these six principles—joy, compassion, respect, enlightenment, love and balance—into our institutions,” said Father Kelly.

Conference breakout sessions focused on the student-athlete and ways in which athletic departments at colleges and universities can more deliberately provide a holistic experience. Athletic leadership agreed that intentional efforts must continue to be made, from the top down, to balance values and focus greater efforts on inclusion, spirituality and faith, and community service—promoting the six Principles of “Sport at the Service of Humanity.” Among the many takeaways that came out of the conference were common themes which participants left determined to explore further:

- Athletics programs must continue to support student-athletes in becoming their “whole selves.” Given the many demands placed on student-athletes, greater attention needs to be placed on balancing the student-athlete experience.
- Assure that institutions’ missions are present in its athletic programs.
- Build positive culture in athletic programs with a focus on inclusion.
- Break down silos that can exist for student-athletes, so they thrive as part of the larger campus community.

- Build a culture that nurtures all parts of the student-athlete, including faith and spirituality. Campus ministers should be readily available to support the student-athlete.
- Provide a more balanced college athletics experience that will send graduates out into the world prepared to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

“A future gathering, and the group that comes together to plan such an event, will emphasize the ways that our athletic programs, pastoral ministry personnel and academic programs could work together with regard to how faith-based institutions might model something different in terms of citizenship—by emphasizing the values of our institutions and the Vatican’s Declaration of Principles,” said Barbara Wall, Vice President for Mission and Ministry at Villanova University. “It is important to address the practicing of these values and virtues as part of our commitment to the formation of citizens for our country. We seek volunteers to be part of this endeavor as we engage in the movement to make ‘Sport at the Service of Humanity’ a reality.”

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