

## **THE PARISH AND ATHLETICS**

by James J. Bacik

- A. A parish sports program can be a useful part of the important parish task of forming community.
1. Parishes are usually too large to be authentic communities as a whole, but they must promote the life of various smaller communities.
  2. Team sports do provide people with some feeling for community. In other words, parish athletic teams deserve the support of pastoral leaders just as do other communities which engage the time and energy of parishioners.
  3. This highlights the need to stress teamwork and the subordination of personal goals to team goals. This should be fostered by coaches and parents.
  4. It is in the context that parents should be encouraged to support decisions of coaches and not to be disruptive influences.
  5. It might be possible to give athletic teams a special role in parish liturgies on certain occasions: for example, a team could serve as readers, ushers and so on at a Sunday liturgy.
- B. Parishes could see athletics as one means of facilitating the personal development of parishioners.
1. Parishes are responsible for the personal growth of parishioners in all dimensions of their existence: physical, emotional, imaginative, intellectual, moral, religious and Christian.
  2. Athletics can be helpful in many of these areas. This is obviously true in the physical dimension since sports often motivate people to get in better shape and hone their skills. Sports also teach people how to handle their emotions such as anger, frustration and sadness as well as the joys of success.
  3. Success in athletics is often a matter of skillful use of imagination and intelligence. Sports call for playing by the rules and have the power to open up the religious dimension of life.
  4. Coaches who are able to give individual attention to athletes are often very influential on them especially if they place the well-being of the person above winning.
  5. It is important to teach youngsters to compete against their own potential and not simply against other persons. It is possible for both coaches and parents to teach this important lesson. Players should be praised for good effort and progress even if this does not include success or victory.
  6. This raises the whole question of allowing all players on teams to participate and not just restricting playing time to the best players. This point would require a great deal of discussion with coaches, parents and players. There is another truth to consider: in real life those with greater skills usually achieve greater success.
  7. It is important for coaches and parents to help youngsters deal with their failures. This requires prudence and sober realism. Failure is part of life. Youngsters should not be totally shielded from this reality. They should be taught resiliency and the ability to persevere and bounce back.
  8. Attention should be given to any gender differences that may influence the personal development of boys and girls through sports.
  9. Sports do not have to promote violence or destructive, competitive spirit. They can promote a healthy sense of competition and a sense of team work.
  10. There is a proper Christian humanism which praises excellence and which fosters a healthy sense of competition. This is opposed to those who believe that all competition, rating, and judging is destructive. That philosophy does not prepare young people for the real world.
- C. Parish athletic programs can serve the important function of developing leaders who have a sense of service.
1. Parishes are to encourage the charisms of all parishioners.
  2. Coaching teams and organizing sports are important ways of living out the Gospel and spreading the kingdom in the world.
  3. Coaches should be made to feel that they are a part of the parish leadership team. They should be encouraged to see their service as part of their Christian calling and a contribution to the well being of the parish.
  4. Coaches should be reminded of the great potential they have in influencing young people for the good. Their personal example is crucial. They must exercise good sportsmanship and proper respect for umpires and referees.

5. Parishes could help develop the leadership qualities of coaches and those involved in athletics in a variety of ways: simple reading material could be put in their hands; there could be a retreat for them or a special blessing for them at Mass. Whatever the means it is important to provide public recognition of their contribution and to make them feel that they are carrying out the Christian task of witnessing to the Gospel in the world.
  6. Coaches who are not able to treat the youngsters with respect should either be taught this virtue or be removed from coaching duties.
  7. Athletics are also the way of developing leadership skills in the young people. The custom of having captains of teams can be helpful in this regard. Coaches and parents could offer guidance to those chosen for these roles.
- D. Parish athletic programs should further the task of promoting justice in the world.
1. Parishes cannot just be turned in on themselves but must be concerned with transforming the world into a more humane place.
  2. Parishes should provide equal opportunities for boys & girls.
  3. Coaches & participants should develop respect for referees, umpires and so on.
  4. Victory and defeat should bring out proper sportsmanship, including due respect for the opponent.
  5. Parish money spent on athletic programs should be fitting and proportionate in relationship to the rest of the budget. Athletics should not dominate other parish programming for young people. There should be other programs for them to express and develop other talents and for the development of the more explicitly religious aspects of life through activities such as retreats.
- E. Parishes should promote athletics as one of the many ways of developing a distinctive Catholic imagination.
1. Parishes need to develop a sense of identity, a pride in belonging.
  2. Parish athletic programs can help participants gain a sense of pride and connection with the parish. This is also true with parents and coaches.
  3. It is good to celebrate the efforts made throughout the season. This could be done through a concluding banquet or some other means. This helps to engender a sense of value of celebrating effort and not just success.
  4. Coaches can become role models, examples of full Christian life.
  5. Priests and sisters who take an interest in athletics can appear as more credible role models to young people.
  6. Athletics could be linked with other parish formation programs. For example there could be a retreat for members of a team or a prayer service at the end of the season.
  7. We should always remember the power of the great Catholic symbols and stories. Notre Dame football functions this way in the Catholic consciousness.
  8. While promoting Catholic identity, athletics should also retain an ecumenical and inner-faith sensitivity. This involves respect for teams representing other traditions.

CYO Appendix II

### **CYO Team Prayer**

**(Members & coaches from both teams are to meet with officials prior to the start of each CYO athletic event and together recite this prayer at that time)**

Lord God, we thank you for bringing us together today and ask that you watch over and guide us:  
Help the athletes use their talents to the fullest and remain injury-free.  
Help the coaches to teach these young athletes not only about the game, but more importantly about being good Christians.  
Help the game officials do their best to enforce the rules and remain fair at all times.  
And help the spectators to be considerate of all players, coaches, officials and each other.  
Thank you for giving all of us the opportunity to put our faith into action today.