

Giving the Best of Yourself: A Summary and Review

Giving the best of yourself: a Document on the Christian perspective on sport and the human person was released on June 1st by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life. The [full text of the document is available here](#), along with a [letter by Pope Francis](#) that offers his support and comments on the document.

In what is believed to be the Vatican's first official document on sport, *Giving the best of yourself* provides a rich and full treatment of the Christian relationship to sport, its impact in our communities, and our responsibility to promote a vision of sport that emphasizes the dignity of all persons as created in the image and likeness of God. It details the Catholic Church's perspective on the immense value of sport in our world today, along with some of the real challenges in our current sport culture, and how sport organizations can best respond to those potential abuses. The *Play Like a Champion Today Educational Series* praises this document, which supports all aspects of our ministerial approach to elevating the sport culture; enabling it to be fun, fair, developmental in focus while inclusive of all.

Pope Francis affirmed the importance of the document, calling sports a "catalyst for experiences of community" and a "formative vehicle." He noted that "sports can be an instrument of encounter, formation, mission and sanctification...like the athlete during training, practicing sport helps us to give our best, to discover our limits without fear and to struggle daily to improve."

In effect, this document describes *Play Like a Champion's* mission and further's the Church's recognition of the important role sport plays in our society and the formation of the human person. *Play Like a Champion* previously collaborated with the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life in May 2015 when Program Directors Clark Power and Kristin Sheehan were invited to participate in their conference: "Coaches: Educating People." Held at the Vatican, that event placed an emphasis on how coaches can most effectively develop their athletes in a holistic manner, foreshadowing a greater entry into the world of sport that manifests itself in the latest document.

While we encourage everyone to read the document in its entirety to understand the rich foundation of the church's investment in sport, here are a few of the major areas discussed:

- A History of Sport in Relation to Society and Christian Tradition
- The Significance of Sports for the Human Person (Body, Mind, Soul)
- Challenges to Sport in Light of Christian Values
- The Catholic Church's Role in Sport

Play Like a Champion agrees wholeheartedly with the document's many rich points and we are proud to champion this approach through our existing programs. Here are just a

few of the key points of the document and how Play Like a Champion is working to embody them in our daily work:

Play

Critical to Play Like a Champion's approach is honoring the "play" aspect of sports. We remind coaches that sports are games that are meant to be playful and bring joy to all those who play. As *Giving the best of yourself* asserts, "sport only makes sense as long as it promotes a space of common joy." Play Like a Champion supports equal playing time for children and works to level the playing field so that athletes of all abilities and backgrounds have the opportunity to play, including those with [exceptionalities](#) and children from [lower socioeconomic environments](#).

Champion

The Vatican emphasizes that "sport is one of the most effective contexts within which people can develop holistically." *Play Like a Champion's* entire approach is designed to help coaches and parents develop their athletes as "total" champions on the playing field and (more importantly) for their entire life. Our curricula give intentional tools to develop the character of athletes centered around the cardinal virtues of fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice. This document acknowledges these core virtues of a moral life can be encouraged through sport participation.

Today

Play Like a Champion curricula help coaches to approach every sport event as an opportunity to guide athletes in becoming the best version of themselves, excelling in body, mind and soul. To be fully effective, coaches must attend to the athlete's physical, emotional, moral and spiritual development. The document reminds us of Saint Pope John Paul II's description of sport as a "form of gymnastics of the body and of the spirit," in that "Athletic activity highlights not only man's valuable physical abilities, but also his intellectual and spiritual capacities. It is not just physical strength and muscular efficiency, but it also has a soul and must show its complete face."

Giving the best of yourself also acknowledges some of the toxic elements of the current sport culture, including a "winning at all costs" attitude, early specialization, spectator misbehavior, and physical, sexual or emotional abuse by coaches. *Play Like a Champion's* coach and parent education specifically addresses each of these challenges through training programs that provide a key role in humanizing the sport environment.

Furthermore, the text notes that "sport needs educators and not simply service providers. Pastoral care through sport...requires people trained and motivated to rediscover the meaning of sport in an educational context and get involved in the

service of a Christian vision of sport." We're proud that those individuals can be found in the many *Play Like a Champion* partner organizations that work tirelessly to educate and form coaches, parents and athletes as well as officials and volunteers. By creating a safe and fun environment in which sports serves the development of the human person, these people are already answering the church's call.

Based on the response thus far, the *Play Like a Champion* community has been encouraged by this document and committed to forwarding the call to holiness through sport that is found in *Giving the best of yourself*. May we all be inspired to continue to work together to elevate the culture of sport through our program partners and educational approach.

Post by Peter Piscitello, Play Like a Champion Today Educational Series

Interested in learning more about Play Like a Champion Today Educational Series programs and events? Email us at information@playlikeachampion.org and visit the "[Programs](#)" section of our website to learn more.