



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

**Bishop John Barres' Address to the Vatican Conference
on the Pastoral Care of Sports
Rome, Italy**

May 16, 2024

I am Bishop John Barres, the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York. I am representing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In regard to suggestions about strengthening the dynamism of the “pastoral care of sport,” I'd like to share a vision statement for an Athletic Department of an American Catholic University that is boldly evangelizing and missiological.

I generated this vision statement in my role as a Board member of the Catholic University of America in Washington DC but it is designed for all Catholic universities and could really be applied to a wide range of evangelizing Catholic Athletic missionary ventures and pastoral contexts.

**Draft of an American Catholic University Department of
Athletics Vision Outline**

The pursuit of holiness and virtue are at the heart of a Catholic University's approach to Athletics.

The Holy Fathers of the Catholic Church always remind us that the world of global sports is “a mission field.”

So we believe that our Catholic University's Athletic administration, our coaches and our athletes are a powerful light of Jesus Christ and the mission of mercy of the Catholic Church in the sports world.

A Catholic University's Athletic Department emphasizes:

- 1) Athletics at a Catholic University are part of the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church and a Catholic University.
- 2) Athletics at a Catholic University are grounded in the liberating truths of Catholic theology and spirituality.

3) Athletics at a Catholic University are dedicated to the Catholic formation of our Catholic Coaches and Catholic Athletes as well as a refined spirit of ecumenism and inter-faith charity with our non-Catholic Coaches and Athletes.

4) Athletics at a Catholic University are focused on giving Glory to God and living the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. Our athletes, focusing on Christ, die to themselves in the athletic sacrifices and training they pursue and rise in Christ-centered, generous, charitable and virtuous athletic performance and solidarity.

5) Athletics at a Catholic University focus on a Catholic Church spirit of communion and mission among the athletes, their coaches and those they compete against. This is a critical dimension of a Catholic formation for their future vocational and career paths.

6) Athletics at a Catholic University focus on a Catholic theology and spirituality of work and the Catholic belief that when we offer God our work/our athletic training they become a means of our sanctification.

7) Athletics at a Catholic University focus on the Sacraments and fidelity to the Sunday Mass. We believe that our athletes are called to live the rhythm of the Catholic Mass in the rhythm of their academic and athletic lives and we believe that the academic life nourishes the athletic life and the athletic life nourishes the academic life.

8) Athletics at a Catholic University connects our Athletes with opportunities to live Jesus and the mission of mercy of the Catholic Church through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, the mentoring of younger Athletes in the area, and their living and witnessing to the Gospel of Life and Catholic Social Justice teaching.

In regard to suggestions about how the Dicastery can help sports ministry workers in their mission, we need an *Evangelium Gaudium* addressed specifically to the global sports world that also incorporates the Catholic Social Justice themes of *Fratelli Tutti*.

We need to articulate a bold evangelizing and global missiological vision for the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics, the World Cup, the Tour de France and the Super Bowl.

In *Evangelium Gaudium* 261, our Holy Father states: “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction. Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts.”

May this new chapter include a new uniquely Catholic evangelizing missiology to the global sports world.

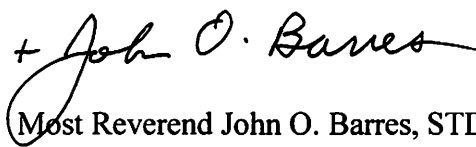
As we know, professional sports is a major for-profit industry focused on financial gain often at the expense of human dignity. Athletes are often seen through the eyes of consumerism, huge

salaries and celebrity status, manipulation and a throw-away culture rather than through the eyes of the Glory of God and the dignity of the human person.

The Catholic Church's evangelizing "pastoral care of sports" is a key dimension of Pope Francis' call to build "an architecture of peace" in the world.

As we approach the Solemnity of Pentecost, together, in union with Pope Francis, we call down the Holy Spirit's creative and missionary tongues of flame on the global sports world.

Prepared for the Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Vatican International Conference on Sport and Spirituality (May 16-18, 2024) by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

Most Reverend John O. Barres, STD, JCL

Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, USA

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Representative to the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education on the Pastoral Care of Sports