

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL STANISŁAW RYLKO,
PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY SEMINAR ON:
"SPORT, EDUCATION, FAITH: FOR A NEW SEASON
FOR THE CATHOLIC SPORTS MOVEMENT"**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Stanisław Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

With real pleasure I send a cordial greeting to you, to the Secretary, to the collaborators of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, to the representatives of the Catholic institutions that work in the world of sport, to those in charge of international and national sports associations and to all the participants in the Study Seminar on the theme: "Sports, education, faith: for a new season for the Catholic sports movement", organized by the "Church and Sports" Section of this Dicastery.

Sports have considerable educational potential in the context of youth and, for this reason, great importance not only in the use of leisure time but also in the formation of the person. The Second Vatican Council listed sports among the educational resources which belong to the common patrimony of humanity and facilitate moral development and human formation (cf. Gravissimum Educationis, n. 4).

If this is true for sports activities in general, it is particularly true for sports in parish youth centres, schools and sports associations, with the aim of assuring the new generations a human and Christian formation.

As I recently had the opportunity to recall, it should not be forgotten that "sports, practiced with enthusiasm and an acute ethical sense, especially for youth become a training ground for healthy competition and physical improvement, a school of formation in the human and spiritual values, a privileged means for personal growth and contact with society" (Address to participants in World Swimming championships, 1 August 2009).

Through sports, the ecclesial community contributes to the formation of youth, providing a suitable environment for their human and spiritual growth. In fact, when sports initiatives aim at the integral development of the person and are managed by qualified and competent personnel, they provide a useful opportunity for priests, religious and lay people to become true and proper educators and teachers of life for the young. In our time when an urgent need to educate the new generations is evident it is therefore necessary for the Church to continue to support sports for youth, making the most of their positive aspects also at competitive levels such as their capacity for stimulating competitiveness, courage and tenacity in pursuing goals. However, it is necessary to

avoid every trend that perverts the nature of sports by recourse to practices that can even damage the body, such as doping. As part of a coordinated, formative effort, Catholic directors, staff and workers must consider themselves expert guides for youth, helping each of them to develop their athletic potential without obscuring those human qualities and Christian virtues that make for a fully mature person.

In this perspective, I find it particularly useful that this Third Seminar of the "Church and Sports" Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is focusing on the specific mission and Catholic identity of sports associations, schools and recreation centres managed by the Church.

I warmly hope that it will help people welcome the many valuable opportunities that sports can offer in the pastoral care of youth. As I wish you a productive meeting, I assure you of my prayers, invoking upon the participants and upon all those involved in promoting healthy sports activities especially in Catholic institutions the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the maternal protection of Mary. With these sentiments, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 3 November 2009

BENEDICT XVI

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