

Vatican document challenges us to give the best of ourselves

From the Archives

DON HORKEY

AUG 23, 2018 SPORTS



Fr. Kelly

Another Nature says autumn arrives in our Eastern Time Zone at 9:54 p.m. on Sept. 22.

For more than 100,000 student-athletes who participate in the fall season of sports sponsored by the Michigan High School Athletic Association, autumn came on the scene Aug. 6 when practices could officially start for football and two days later for all other sports: cross country, soccer and tennis for boys, and cross country, golf, swimming and volleyball for girls.

By the time you read this, competitive juices will be flowing for most, if not all, of the 26 schools comprising the Catholic High School League for its 92nd year. Right behind, the CYO will begin its 85th season on the grade and middle schools levels.

Back on June 1, the Vatican released a bombshell of an announcement that could/should/would alter the way sports on any level is viewed and played anywhere in the world. The Vatican made public its first major document about sports, “Giving the best of yourself: A document on the Christian perspective on sport and the human person.” I didn’t give it much thought — OK, none at all — until Judge Michael J. Riordan, of the Michigan Court of Appeals, notified me that “one of my classmates helped write it.” Sure enough. There he was, Fr. Patrick Kelly, SJ, one of four speakers on the dais at the press conference. How many times does it happen that a declaration from the Vatican has a connection to the CHSL and CYO? Fr. Kelly played football at Redford St. Valentine, and football, basketball and track at Bishop Borgess High School. In his junior year, he garnered All State and All Catholic honors at tailback and safety. “He was the toughest guy to bring down,” Riordan says. And quick, too.

“I was offensive center, just pushing people around,” providing space for Kelly to slip through. “I’d look and he was gone.” Football his senior year ended five days before the season started. He broke his ankle in practice. Interest from college recruiters dried up, so he went to Grand Valley State as a football walk-on. He was starting safety as a freshman, eventually won All Conference laurels, and was elected team captain his senior year.

“My college experience was important for another reason: My faith came alive in a new way,” Fr. Kelly says. “I became interested in Jesus’ story, which spoke powerfully to me.” He went on to get a degree in religious studies at the University of Detroit (“where I got to know the Jesuits”), a master’s from Harvard Divinity School, and after his ordination in 1999, a doctorate in theology, ethics and culture at the School of Religion of the Claremont Graduate University. He has been associate professor of theology and religious studies at Seattle University for the past 12 years.

Fr. Kelly, 58, is recognized internationally for his books, articles, presentations and conferences dealing with a Catholic perspective on sports. “This all surprises me. I thought I had left sports behind. But going into my doctoral studies I wondered: What would a Catholic take be on sports?” His “take” and that of his fellow collaborators produced a document “to help (us) understand the relationship between giving our very best in sports and in living the Christian faith in every aspect of our lives.” The document is intended for “players, teachers, coaches, parents or those for whom sport is a job as well as a vocation.” No way can I in a few hundred words come close to describing the essence of a text that consumes more than 21,000 words. I recommend it as mandatory reading, particularly Chapter 3, which examines a series of elements that are the formula for the harmonious development of body, soul and spirit. (Google “Vatican document Giving the best of yourself” for a copy of the full document).

Playing within the rules, fair play, sacrifice, individualism and teamwork, the joy of participation, equality, respect and the common good all are aspects where the human being, whether a participant or a spectator, experiences significant truths about him- or herself on his or her quest for the ultimate meaning of who we are in God’s image and likeness, just as He created us.

Pope Francis sums up the document’s message in a talk he gave to young people in 2014 that could serve as a pep talk for all of us today: “Challenge yourself in the game of life like you are in the game of sports. Challenge yourself in the quest for good, in both Church and society, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm. Get involved with others and with God; spend your life on what really matters and lasts forever.” Fr. Kelly will be in the Metro area next month visiting his parents and family in Canton, reuniting Sept. 7 for the 40th anniversary of the Bishop Borgess Class of 1978, doing a workshop with Detroit Mercy coaches and student athletes on Sept. 11, and celebrating Mass for the beginning of the school year at UDM on Sept. 13.

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Catholic officials encourage parishioners to take 2020 census, if they haven't yet

DANIEL MELOY

JUL 23, 2020 LOCAL



Fr. Tim McCabe, SJ, executive director of the Pope Francis Center in downtown Detroit, smiles along with a client of the center in December 2019. The Michigan Catholic Conference is working with parishes to promote the 2020 census among groups that are traditionally undercounted, including the homeless population and non-native English speakers. (Valaurian Waller | Detroit Catholic)

Accurate count affects congressional representation, funding for everything from Medicaid to infrastructure and social services

DETROIT — The COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted just about everything in normal American life.

Masses, family gatherings, camping trips and a full Major League Baseball season have all been either suspended, altered or simply canceled. But one thing that must constitutionally continue is the census.

The official count of the U.S. population, which occurs every decade, affects everything from funding of local community services and civic centers to congressional and legislative districts.

The coronavirus forced the U.S. Census Bureau to push the census deadline from April to Oct. 31, giving people more time to complete the online questionnaire.

“The Michigan Catholic Conference has always felt participation in the U.S. Census is really important,” said Annie Bennett, communications and outreach associate with the conference, which represents the Church in Michigan in public policy discussions. “When COVID came, we made sure we had the resources available for parishes and people to fill out the census, particularly when information changed.”

Michigan currently has a 68.3% response rate for the census, the third best in the country, but census officials are worried about undercounting lower-income populations in urban areas and Spanish-speaking households.

Households have until Aug. 11 to complete the census before officials send in-person census-takers to track down addresses that haven’t replied — a situation officials would like to avoid in a time of social distancing.

“While we are excited with the results we have so far, considering all the challenges our communities are facing now, we still have some weak areas,” said Kerry Eberfole Singh, executive director of the 2020 Census for the State of Michigan.

Singh pointed to areas like Detroit, Flint, Benton Harbor and Muskegon that are behind in responding, along with rural areas of the state where internet access is limited.

“Traditionally, census response rates track closely with household income,” Singh said. “Those with lower incomes tend not to complete the census forms, along with students and renters living in a multi-unit house where they may just throw out the mail instead.”

The census influences the country’s congressional representation — states with more people have a higher number of representatives — but also affects funding levels for critical services, including Medicaid, programs to assist low-income women, children and families with nutritional needs and education, road infrastructure and grants for tutoring, textbooks and other school programs.

In 2016, Michigan received almost \$30 billion through federal programs that used 2010 census data.

“When the state’s people are not counted, Michigan communities lose out,” Bennett said. “We’ve seen in so many ways how an accurate count matters for everyone in the community. The census data even affected money for coronavirus relief. This pandemic is one more way of showing how important it is to be counted, making sure the local community has the resources it needs.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference is working with certain communities, particularly those with limited internet access and those who live in apartment complexes where the unique identifier number needed to complete the online census may have been lost in the mail-delivery process, to boost response rates.

“One of things we did this year was provide additional parish resources that are in Spanish,” Bennett said. “We want to make sure they get accurate information in a way parishioners feel comfortable responding. We also know the homeless population is undercounted, so we’re providing resources to parishes that work with the homeless to make sure they are counted as well.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference also is offering resources at www.micatholic.org/2020census for parishes to host in-person census responses if internet access is an issue for a household.

The coronavirus singled many parishes and organizations from hosting in-person census events, but Singh said churches and community groups still play a vital role in distributing census information.

As society begins to reopen, parishes can host events for parishioners who don’t have access to the internet, where they can fill out the census at a central location without their unique identification number by visiting www.my2020census.gov.

People can also complete the census through a toll-free number or a paper form that every household in the state was sent.

“We get questions about how long it takes to fill out the census — it’s only 10 minutes,” Singh said. “It’s actually nine questions that are asked, and all the information is confidential. The questions are pretty basic, and the census can’t share it with any government agency or individual. You probably are giving more information out on Facebook.”

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