Welcome

Rev. Peter Donohue
President, Villanova University

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Welcome, and thank you for being here for the Sport at the Service of Humanity Conference.

We are delighted to welcome you to Villanova for this event, which seeks to build on the Vatican’s Sport at the Service of Humanity initiative and to support His Holiness Pope Francis’ desire to explore how faith and sports can promote the betterment of society.

The principles of the initiative—compassion, respect, love, enlightenment, balance and joy—are in line with Villanova’s Augustinian, Catholic values—truth, unity and love—and fit well with our educational mission.

We welcome this chance to engage other higher education leaders on how faith and sports can bring people together and prepare us for life’s many opportunities and challenges.

As many in this room know, and have experienced, sports have a way of bringing people together.

Whether it’s getting together with friends to cheer for a favorite team, finding an instant connection with a stranger who is also a die-hard Villanova fan, or joining a pick-up game on the playground ... Few activities have the power to unite people from all walks of life like sports.

The immense value of sports has been well-documented. Aside from the physical benefits, there are numerous benefits for the mind and soul. Sports teach us how to work together, how to be leaders, and how to deal with disappointment. We learn discipline and accountability... and we realize the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

These invaluable life lessons transcend sports. Sports allow us to understand that life will inevitably have highs and lows, it won’t always be fair, and that sometimes the best team doesn’t always win. At the end of the day, sports unite us.

Sport cuts across race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. It has a potential to TRULY change people and societies. I don’t think it’s overstating to say that sports are a way for us all to be more inclusive and just, and thereby create more inclusive and just world.
As Pope Francis requested, let us see “sport as a gift from God, an opportunity not only to bring our talents to fruition, but also as a responsibility.” We have a responsibility to share the benefits of sports with others ... to communicate its many and varied advantages. Let us use sport to help others, particularly those who are poor or disadvantaged. Let us use it to build trust and understanding. Let us use sport to learn graciousness in victory and perspective in defeat, allowing us to be our best selves. And finally, let us use it to meet one another across borders and boundaries, to learn to compete as friends, and to respect and trust one another even in opposition. Every one of us has the opportunity to be transformed by sport and to transform others through it.

I look forward to the discussion today and tomorrow around these themes and how we can fully integrate them into our lives. And my hope is that this conversation and dialogue continues long after this event has concluded.

Thank you again for being here, and for everyone involved, particularly those at Villanova and the BIG EAST who helped make this event possible.