

## **VILLANOVA TO HOST FOLLOW-UP CONFERENCE ON VATICAN'S FAITH AND SPORTS INAUGURAL EVENT**

NEW YORK – The BIG EAST Conference and Villanova University announced today that Villanova will host a regional conference on “Sport at the Service of Humanity” on June 7-8, 2017 on Villanova’s campus in Villanova, Pennsylvania. The conference, which will be inclusive of all denominations, is the first to be sanctioned by the Vatican following its inaugural conference on faith and sports in Rome in October 2016.

The Sport at the Service of Humanity initiative was created by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Culture and is built around the “declaration of principles”: joy, compassion, respect, enlightenment, love and balance. The inaugural conference, held at the Vatican on October 5-7, 2016, included two days of intensive discussion among religious leaders, athletes, business leaders, academicians, media representatives and other stakeholders, with a focus on how sport and faith can drive positive social change and foster inclusion, involvement and inspiration among people from diverse backgrounds.

The inaugural conference was organized with the special support of the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations. In opening remarks to the conference delegates, Pope Francis noted the importance of preserving fun and joy in sports and making sports accessible to all, regardless of ability, and particularly migrants and the disadvantaged. IOC President Thomas Bach and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also spoke at the opening ceremony.

BIG EAST Commissioner Val Ackerman was a delegate at the inaugural conference and served on an advisory committee assembled to develop the framework and content for the event. She led a breakout session on the opening day of the conference on the inclusion of women in sport globally.

"Villanova is very excited 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," said Villanova University President Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA. "The principles of the conference are fully in line with Villanova’s mission and values, and we welcome the chance to engage other higher education leaders on how faith and sports can bring people together and ready young people for life’s many opportunities and challenges."

Bishop Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said: “The aim of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in conjunction with the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee, in sponsoring the initial Conference on Sport and Faith at the Vatican was to celebrate the value of sport; its capacity to bring joy to participants and observers, to promote physical and mental wellbeing and to create bridges between people.”

Bishop Tighe continued: “The Conference brought together people from diverse backgrounds with a view to creating a broad movement - Sport at the Service of Humanity - to ensure that sport realizes its inherent potential to enrich human lives. The Council is very pleased to be

associated with Villanova and the BIG EAST Conference in the promotion of a conference that aims to ensure that this movement and the principles on which it is built engage the attention and the energy of key players from the world of college sport in the USA” .

"The BIG EAST Conference is honored to join with the Vatican and Villanova in staging this important gathering, which will help carry forward themes and action steps developed at the inaugural Vatican conference in October," said Ackerman. "Intercollegiate athletics programs are an ideal platform to build character and teach values, and we hope the Villanova conference will reinforce these benefits and the role sports play in building bridges and improving lives."

The Villanova conference, which will be hosted by the Office of Mission and Ministry, will be an invitation-only event and is expected to attract administrative, academic and athletic leaders and influencers from within college sports, including from faith-driven institutions.

**About Villanova University:** Since 1842, Villanova University's Augustinian Catholic intellectual tradition has been the cornerstone of an academic community in which students learn to think critically, act compassionately and succeed while serving others. There are more than 10,000 undergraduate, graduate and law students in the University's six colleges—the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Villanova School of Business, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, the College of Professional Studies and the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law. Ranked among the nation's top universities, Villanova supports its students' intellectual growth and prepares them to become ethical leaders who create positive change everywhere life takes them. For more, visit [www.villanova.edu](http://www.villanova.edu).

**About the BIG EAST:** The BIG EAST Conference is an association of ten nationally prominent colleges and universities that foster healthy athletic competition, community service and the pursuit of excellence in academic environments. The athletic programs of BIG EAST institutions provide national-caliber participation opportunities for more than 3,500 student-athletes on over 180 men's and women's teams in 22 sports. Established in 1979 and headquartered in New York City, the BIG EAST's members are located in seven of the country's top 35 largest media markets and include Butler University, Creighton University, DePaul University, Georgetown University, Marquette University, Providence College, St. John's University, Seton Hall University, Villanova University and Xavier University. For more information, visit [www.bigeast.com](http://www.bigeast.com).