



Apostolic
ATHLETES

11 Priests and Bishops Reveal How Sports
Helped Them Follow Christ's Call

Collected by Trent Beattie

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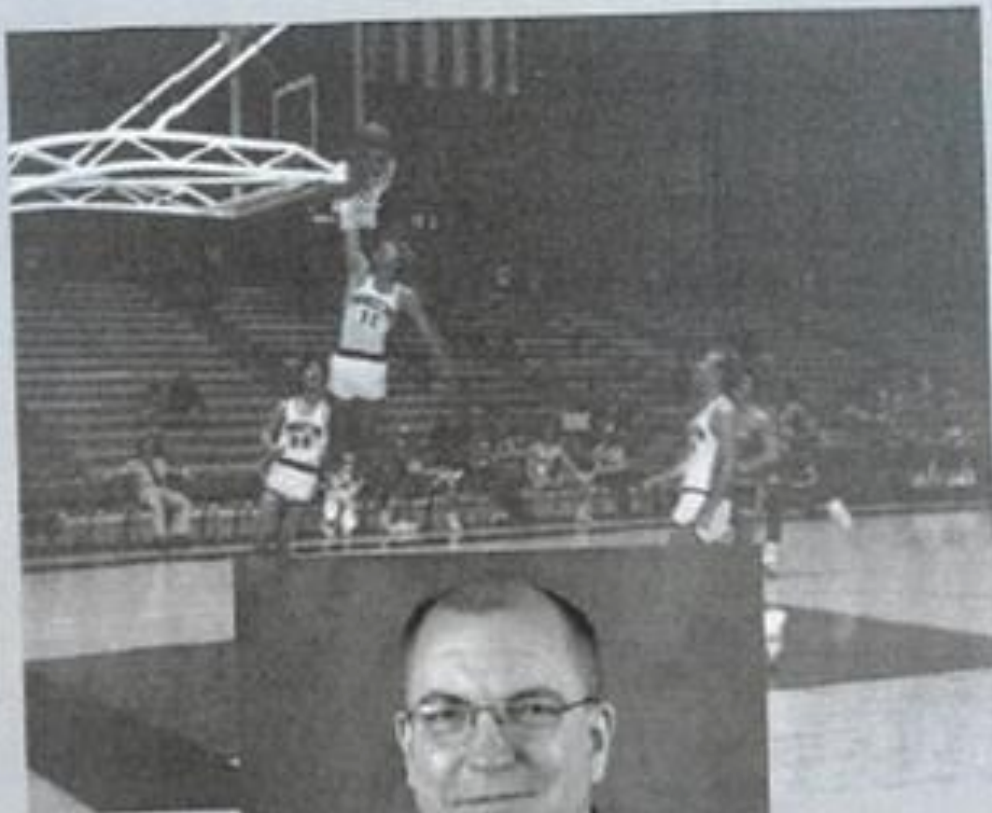
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BISHOP
JOHN BARRES

*From College Point Guard to
Point Guard for the Church*

This chapter is dedicated to all my coaches and teammates through the years who have inspired, pushed, and challenged me. It is also dedicated to the spiritual directors, brother priests and bishops, and the People of God who have coached me in the ways of “holiness and mission.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT MOVES at every moment in every one of our lives. The Holy Spirit has moved in my life in a call to the priesthood and a call to be a bishop.

My parents, Oliver and Marjorie Barres, were Protestant minister converts who met each other at the Yale Divinity School. They entered the Catholic Church in 1955, and my father wrote a book entitled *One Shepherd, One Flock*, recounting the story of my parents' decision to become Roman Catholics.

They were attracted to the splendor of truth in the Catholic Church and the doctrine of apostolic succession — our belief that we can trace the lineage of Catholic bishops through the centuries directly back to the apostles, and ultimately to Christ Himself.

In God's Providence, one of the consequences of my parents' courageous decision to put truth first in their lives was that on July 30, 2009 — 54 years after their conversion — their fifth child of six was ordained a Catholic bishop, thereby becoming part of that line of apostolic succession that led them to Catholicism.

Every priest and bishop has a unique story to share about how he discovered and responded to his vocation. In addition to the narrative of my parents' conversion and courageous decision-making, which so dramatically affected where God would lead them and their family, I also have had athletic experiences in which the Holy Spirit formed and shaped me, and which have been deeply connected to my call as a priest and bishop.

Early Basketball Experiences and St. Augustine's Parish CYO Basketball

My large family moved into a new house in 1964, and I can remember going into the backyard and discovering a basketball court. I picked up a basketball for the first time at the age of four and could not make my "shots" reach the basket, but have been hooked on the game ever since.

I can remember being determined to play Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) basketball as a fifth grader (the only one on the team) on the fifth-sixth grade team at St. Augustine's Parish in Larchmont, New York. It was a memorable gym with spin-dial scoreboards and a bicycle horn used as a buzzer.

From seventh to eighth grade, we were coached by Joe Gallick, a 6'5" Iona College player from the early '70s who both looked like and admired New York Knick Phil Jackson — a somewhat marginal player with a huge heart and non-stop hustle and drive. Joe sensed something great in the character and spirit of Phil Jackson, and Jackson's subsequent brilliant coaching career confirmed Joe's intuition.

Joe was my basketball mentor. He really taught all of his players a love for basketball, the fundamentals, and the history of the game. The team was fast, quick, and clever, so he taught us the press of renowned UCLA coach John Wooden.

Joe patiently melded together some very spirited personalities with different kinds of games. He took us to the Nassau Coliseum to see "the Doctor" (Julius Erving) play for the Nets. Joe drove a beat-up Camaro convertible with holes in the roof. We caught his love for the game and the importance of real commitment to improvement.

To that end, he encouraged our team in the summer of 1973 — between seventh and eighth grade — to go to the John V. Mara CYO Sports Camp, sponsored by the Archdiocese of New York and run by the basketball coach and players of Cardinal Hayes High School.

It was, in the best sense, a basketball boot camp — constant drills and running, some personal time with a Holy

Cross College assistant coach who helped me hone the Jerry West-style jump shot I was aspiring to, and many games from morning to night. I think all of us came away from those two weeks with an even deeper commitment to hard work. I never improved as much in a two-week period as I did then.

One of my most vivid memories was of Terence Cardinal Cooke (now a Servant of God) flying in on a helicopter and landing on the baseball field. I remember making a point of going over to him to shake his hand, and I remember the peace and goodness in that gentle, holy face.

I was also a good gymnastic tumbler and vaulter during this period. I always felt that my experience of round-offs, handsprings, and flips on the gymnastic floor helped me develop aggressive drives to the basket, an emerging jump shot, and all the in-the-air transactions that are part of basketball. I ended up choosing basketball over gymnastics in eighth grade, but have always been grateful for the top-flight gymnastics training I received at Hommocks Middle School.

With my parents' encouragement and sacrifices, my four sisters, my brother, and I pursued athletics in a united, mutually encouraging, and supportive way. My brother was an outstanding baseball player and a precocious student of the effective baseball swing. We grew up on Bayard Street, and so the Bayard Street neighborhood sports experience was also critical to my development. The neighborhood was filled with boys of all ages, so with creativity, initiative, and negotiation, we organized daily touch football and tackle football games, Wiffle ball, stick ball, Wiffle ball golf, and hours upon hours of basketball. We all have great memories of these games, the brotherhood we shared, and the communal sense of relating boy to boy, and family to family.

Larchmont Little League

Some of my most powerful and emotional childhood memories revolve around the Larchmont Little League. These occurred at the time of the Apollo moon launches in the spring of 1969.

I was 8 years old and was being drafted onto a new expansion team in the Larchmont Cap League called the "Space Cadets."

At the time, "Space Cadet" had no derogatory connotation, but after our winless expansion season, we might very well have been responsible for creating it. I made contact with the baseball just once the entire season. Like most young Little Leaguers, I experienced moments equivalent to the Wide World of Sports' "Agony of Defeat," but also moments of Little League Glory.

After my first seasons as a Space Cadet and a Maroon Monster, I had a great two-year run of championships that began with playing first base for the Corner Store Pirates and winning the Minor League championship. I remember making a lot of clutch hits and some gymnastics-aided diving catches, but I also remember committing an error late in a game near the end of the season that prevented us from being undefeated. This experience led me to dive into the backseat of the family car crying, but I also had the resilience to make a comeback after that game-losing error and have a sparkling championship series.

Then in my first year of the Majors on the Village Ford Cubs, we had an unbelievable experience of team chemistry and momentum. We were a mediocre 6-4 in the regular season and then ignited in the playoffs, beating the Mamaroneck Fire Department Foxes in the championship.

In the late innings of the final championship series game, I made a series of clutch plays at shortstop. I robbed one batter of a single up the middle with a horizontal diving catch on a grounder. Sprawled on the ground, I touched second base for the out, jumped up, and threw a runner out at home plate for a unique double-play that helped prevent the Foxes from mounting the late inning rallies they were known and feared for.

The following year, I seemed to lose the magic touch I had had for fielding at shortstop, and I made some embarrassing errors in the field. In one of the early games, with my newly-drafted little brother Bill playing beside me at second

base, a pop-fly was hit clearly to the second baseman. As shortstop, I called Bill off the pop ... and dropped it — one of those stories between brothers that lives on decades later. We had a mediocre season that final year, but the Larchmont Little League experience resulted in my growth as an athlete, a person, a leader, and an invested young member of the Larchmont community.

Caddie at Winged Foot Golf Club

I found out about caddying at Winged Foot Golf Club through my next door neighbor and my best friend's father, who was a friend of the caddie master who assigned caddies to golfers and managed the tee times of the golfers.

Winged Foot hosted the U.S. Open in 1929 (won by Bobby Jones), 1959 (Billy Casper), 1974 (Hale Irwin), 1984 (Fuzzy Zoeller), and 2006 (Geoff Ogilvy), as well as the 1997 PGA (Davis Love III). It will host the 2020 U.S. Open. At the 1974 U.S. Open, I had a chance to immerse myself in golf history when, as an eighth-grader with a caddie badge pass, I watched every round of what became known as "the Massacre at Winged Foot," chronicled by sportswriter Dick Schaap, when former University of Colorado football player Hale Irwin won the U.S. Open at 7 over par.

I normally do not associate the U.S. Open with the Mass and the Eucharist, but Dick Schaap tells a story about Bobby Jones at the 1929 U.S. Open that involved the Mass: "After Bobby Jones' twelve-foot putt forced the 1929 Open into a playoff, USGA officials notified Jones and co-leader Al Espinosa that their thirty-six-hole playoff would start at nine A.M., the next day, a Sunday. Jones, always the gentleman, suggested that the starting time be pushed back until ten so that Espinosa, a Catholic could attend Mass. Sunday morning, at St. Vito's Church near Winged Foot, Al Espinosa was at Mass; so was Bobby Jones, who was not a Catholic."

What an extraordinary story of what it means to be a Christian gentleman. Bobby Jones not only arranged for the tee time to change so that Al Espinosa and his wife could

attend Sunday Mass but, as a non-Catholic, he attended the Mass himself with his Catholic wife Clara.

The story does not end there. On December 15, 1971, three days before his death, Bobby Jones converted to Catholicism and received the Sacraments on his death bed.

I like to think that Bobby Jones' generous and magnanimous Eucharistic gesture at the 1929 U.S. Open at Winged Foot helped prepare him to open his soul to the fullness of the truths of Catholicism and the grace of receiving our Lord in the Eucharist three days before he died.

I first went out to caddie in the spring of 1972 between sixth and seventh grade. We had heard that you had to wait on the caddie bench for a couple of days before the caddie master let you have a bag. This was a test of your commitment and whether you would stick with caddying.

That experience as a fidgety middle school boy sitting there with the other aspiring caddies, knowing that we had to master our natures in order to wait and be patient, eventually became an image of waiting and being patient in prayer. There is something about working through restlessness and waiting patiently in a caddie yard that would later become a symbol for me of working through restlessness and distraction in periods of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Children can be quite intuitive about adults. This makes caddying a real education about human nature for a young person. Being with a golfer for four plus hours, sharing his experience of the ups and downs, glories and tragedies in a round of golf, allows you to pick up on character strengths and weaknesses. You pick up on character strengths and mood changes. You react and work through them.

I learned about the sensitivity adults need to have in trying to encourage young people. I had some great experiences with golfers and I had a few very bad ones. But it was the bad experiences that most taught me as a priest and bishop to be as sensitive, patient, and supportive as possible with young people.

So often, just when we think young people are not paying attention, they get it completely. If we model the Gospel

consistently, powerful seeds of faith can be planted at the most unexpected moments. In turn, children and young people of all ages, so often extraordinarily perceptive about adults, have a great capacity to evangelize and inspire adults with the freshness and vitality of their faith.

Yale Football Family History and the Influence and Encouragement of Yale Basketball Captain Mike Baskauskas

My uncle, Herster Barres, Yale Class of 1932, was the right end for the great 5'7" Yale quarterback Albic Booth, known as "Little Boy Blue." Booth was such a Yale legend that he actually has a verse devoted to him in the old-time classic song "You Gotta Be a Football Hero."

In just about any history of Yale football, you will find that Herster Barres' opening kickoff touchdown saving tackle and his 30-yard pass reception from Booth were critical factors in Yale defeating Harvard 3-0 in their 1931 game at Harvard Stadium. I have a picture in my office of my uncle in his Yale football uniform and had the privilege of personally donating on behalf of our extended family old reels of Yale football film, taken by my grandfather at the Yale Bowl during the 1929-1931 seasons, to the great Coach Carmen Cozza for the Yale football archives.

My father, Oliver (Yale Class of 1943), was much younger than my uncle. He used to join his father and the packed crowds of 70,000 at the Yale Bowl to see his older brother play. Yale football was a generational tradition, so my father took me at the age of 8 to the November 2, 1968 Yale-Dartmouth game to see legendary quarterback Brian Dowling and running back Calvin Hill. I was mesmerized by the atmosphere and pageantry — and by the exciting play of these two legends.

Just a few weeks later, Yale and Harvard, both undefeated teams, met at Harvard Stadium for a showdown, 37 years after the heroics of Albic Booth and Herster Barres in the 1931

game. Yale had a commanding lead and their fans were already waving their white handkerchiefs when Harvard scored two touchdowns and two two-point conversions in the last 42 seconds, resulting in a 29-29 tie. I cried over that game, and it made me realize that in the world of sports, as in life, nothing is totally predictable, that momentum can shift in a moment.

This Yale football context and tradition in our family led me, as basketball emerged as the sport I would focus on, to go to some Yale basketball games. Mike Baskauskas was the 6'4" Yale basketball captain from 1972-1974, and I saw him play against a great Penn team in March 1973. Yale was trounced in that game, but Baskauskas' hard work, relentless all-out hustle, and dedication made a lasting impression on me. I wrote a letter to him, and we began a correspondence in which he emphasized hard work, discipline, and dedication as the path to improving my game.

He sent me a large packet of ball-handling drill ideas and wrote: "Dear John, I believe you'll be a fine player someday. But you've got to realize that to be successful, you must totally commit yourself to your goal. If you want to be a super player, you should want to put in a super effort to work hard."

I eventually wrote a tribute piece to Mike Baskauskas in the Sunday *New York Times* Sports section when I was playing as a junior point guard on the Princeton junior varsity basketball team. Though I have never had the chance to meet Mike, his letters and support stoked my desire to play Ivy League basketball and have served as a constant point of reference for how to encourage and mentor young people effectively.

Andover Basketball and the Inspiration of St. John Neumann

I transferred to Phillips Academy (Andover) for my junior year of high school, starting in the fall of 1976. My father and uncle had attended the school, so there was a family tradition going. Fortunately, Andover gave me an excellent financial aid package that enabled me to attend.

The intensity and quality of the academics was extraordinary, and the competition on the varsity basketball team was just as intense. The team included the future Harvard 1981 basketball captain and a future Princeton football All-American safety. I can remember thinking at the end of varsity tryouts that I would most likely be cut, but as I went to the dining hall, I joyfully discovered that I was on the list pinned to the announcement board. I had made the team.

This team went on a tear with the talent we had playing for us, and somehow I ended up getting a fair amount of playing time as a fast and driven 5'11", 135-pound point guard, coming off the bench and playing intense pressure defense. It was a great experience, and my Andover teammates, like my Princeton teammates, are lifelong friends.

In January-February 1977, in the middle of this great basketball season, I wrote a paper on St. John Neumann, who would be canonized just a few months later in Rome by Blessed Pope Paul VI. The paper ended up being published in a few Catholic magazines.

Saint John Neumann's life of priestly missionary zeal, complete love for the Word of God and the cosmic power of the Catholic Mass, along with his humility and care for the poor, were a great inspiration to me. His life and priestly dedication hit me at an unexpectedly deep level.

Then one day at Mass, in the midst of writing this term paper on St. John Neumann and right in the middle of our winning basketball season, the priest raised the chalice at the consecration, and in silent peace, I asked: "Lord, do You want me to be a priest?" It was the beginning of my discernment of a call to the priesthood through the intercession of this great American priest-saint.

Saint John Neumann had been bishop of Philadelphia in the 19th century (he died in 1860), and the Philadelphia Diocese at the time contained the five counties that would much later (in 1961) become the Diocese of Allentown. As a junior in high school who was deeply inspired and moved by St. John Neumann's holy life, I never dreamed that I would be

named his successor for the Diocese of Allentown, as I was in 2009. The Holy Spirit was deeply at work in my life in a rich way, just as the Holy Spirit is at work in all of our lives.

As the bishop of the Diocese of Allentown, I make periodic trips to the St. John Neumann Shrine in Philadelphia, asking the saint to intercede for me, to help me be a deeply holy and missionary bishop, and that the people of God of the Diocese of Allentown would be deeply holy and missionary. As I kneel before his body encased in the altar of sacrifice, I ask St. John Neumann to intercede for a rich harvest of holy vocations to the priesthood, just as he interceded for me to become a priest and his successor as bishop of the Diocese of Allentown.

Athletic Crisis and Conversion on the Andover Varsity Basketball Team

Many of our great Andover players had graduated by my senior year, so I had hoped to become the starting point guard. But I kept throwing the ball away in one preseason practice, and the coach demoted me to the second team.



I thought a lot over Christmas break and found a short pamphlet about dedicating your athletic life to Jesus Christ and the glory of God. It was a Christocentric, evangelical pamphlet, which I adapted to the fuller Catholic perspective on the objective truths of the Creed, the Sacraments, Catholic moral teaching, and prayer. I think the deeply-felt pain of losing my starting position made me open to considering this perspective.

My whole approach changed. I had always been deeply Catholic, but I had never connected my Catholic faith to my love for basketball. Though I might have appeared humble and modest to most people, I realized that I had been playing basketball in an ego-driven, rather than Christ-driven, way. That is why I was so crushed the day I lost my starting position.

When I returned from Christmas break, my attitude had changed; I was consciously connecting basketball to my very personal faith and prayer, and to the power of the Eucharist and the Mass. This made me more at peace, and I played better.

Eventually, later in the season, I was back in the starting lineup, but more deeply connected to, and centered on, Christ. I was more peaceful and centered in pressure situations because I was playing with, in, and for Christ, rather than for myself. It was a turning point that could have only occurred through failure, disappointment, and the carrying of a cross that opened me to a whole new and deeper faith perspective.

Crisis can lead to conversion, and my athletic crisis — as small as it was in ordinary terms — led to my internal conversion and prepared me for the rich experience of Princeton basketball.

The Princeton Basketball Experience, Coach Pete Carril, Spiritual Director Fr. James Halligan, and the Cosmic Power of the Catholic Mass

My three years playing junior varsity basketball at Princeton from 1978-1981 (I went up to the WPRB broadcast booth as an announcer my senior year) were exciting and deeply formational at every level.

As I was growing up, Princeton basketball always had a certain mystique for me. I watched legendary Princeton Rhodes Scholar Bill Bradley on the 1969-70 NBA Championship Knicks and heard radio announcer Marv Albert say from the Garden: "Frazier to Bradley. Bradley, side jump, YES!"

I read John McPhee's book, *A Sense of Where You Are*, on Bradley's Princeton career. I also remember, as a ninth

grader, watching Princeton's run of upsets in the 1975 National Invitational Tournament at Madison Square Garden and seeing Coach Pete Carril and his players celebrate on the court after their final victory over Providence. I was mesmerized by an Ivy League team finishing the season at number 12 in the country. Little did I know, watching the Madison Square Garden celebration as a ninth grader, that Coach Pete Carril would one day become a friend and mentor.

Our JV coaches taught us Princeton basketball well. At the JV level, we were playing for pure love of the game, since we played in front of about 50-200 people and at times helped to prepare the varsity for their weekend games.

I had always enjoyed fast break basketball, and my speed and endurance made me effective at that style of play. But Princeton basketball was a whole new experience, involving a slower, possession-style offense. It is a beautiful blend of the building up and execution of fundamentals, such as precise chest passes (which raise shooting percentages), the setting up and timing behind effective picks, and the timing and execution of backdoor cuts and layups. To this day, Princeton basketball is an art form that involves intuitional team chemistry built on the foundation of sharply-honed fundamentals and radical unselfishness.

My academic work and playing at Jadwin Gym were connected to the daily Mass I attended with fellow Princetonians at 12:10 p.m. in Marquand Transept in the University Chapel. Mysteriously, I was living the sacrificial cosmic power of the Mass as I lived the sacrificial dimension of both my academic life and Princeton basketball.

Just as the aggressive basketball coaching at Princeton was helping to expand my character, leadership, and an understanding of how to promote team chemistry, I took on another critical coach — my spiritual director, Fr. James Halligan. He was stationed at Our Lady of Victory Parish on William Street in New York City, and I would take the train in to see him for spiritual direction every couple of weeks.

Father Halligan was radiant with holiness and listened to me during spiritual direction with a compassionate and contemplative focus. He listened the way that Christ would have listened, which encouraged me to tell him about everything I had experienced in life.

He had experienced many serious and life-threatening health problems for many years. His humble embrace of the Cross resulted in exceptional pastoral insight and receptivity to the gift of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to work so humbly, gently, and powerfully in his priesthood. He had the most insight into human nature of any human being whom I have ever met.

At the end of the sessions, after I went to Confession, he would coach me about praying the Mass and the Rosary, meditating on Scripture, connecting to God with spiritual reading, and witnessing to my Catholic faith with a missionary spirit. He was gentle and compassionate, but as demanding as our basketball coaches at Jadwin Gym. The Holy Spirit used Fr. Halligan's spiritual direction — his pastoral insight, as well as his gentle and compassionate spirit — to begin forming me, especially my future pastoral charity and presence as a priest and bishop.

Sometimes it is only with the passage of time and deep prayer that the Holy Spirit gently reveals how different dimensions of your life have fit together. On February 24, 2007, Princeton University asked me, as a member of the Class of 1982's 25th reunion, to deliver the homily at the Princeton Service of Remembrance on Alumni Day at the University Chapel.

It was a unique opportunity to reflect on the spiritual, academic, and athletic dimensions of the Princeton experience as a Catholic priest. Here is a section from that homily, addressed to Princeton alumni of all ages in a packed University Chapel:

But a *Service of Remembrance* is not only about the past. Remembering past Princetonians reminds us of what is important in the present. C.S. Lewis once

said that the men and women who end up being most productive in life are those who keep their eyes on Eternity.

Similarly, St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* encourages us to meditate on the scene of our own death bed. The purpose is to discern what exactly would be important to us at that moment. With that insight, we then project those priorities back into the present moment of our lives to enrich and deepen them. A *Service of Remembrance* helps us to do that. Our presence here shows that we want to do it.

Another way that a *Service of Remembrance* anchors us in the present is by evoking the living memories of our own Princeton experience that continue to influence us today. These memories will be as diverse as we are. But they are united in their impact on our lives. I share with you now some of my memories to help rekindle some of your own.

A senior thesis with Professor T.P. Roche focused on T.S. Eliot's transition from agnosticism to faith, as seen in his plays. Professor Joseph Frank's blend of history, biography, and literary criticism in his Dostoevsky seminar helped me to understand how the Russian novelist "came to faith through the furnace of doubt."

Professor Paul Ramsay's Christian Ethics course helped prepare me to read the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II. Intensive French grammar with Professor Andre Maman and a 19th-century French novel course with Professor Victor Brombert eventually led to a doctoral dissertation in Rome on the 17th century French School of spirituality.

Three years of JV basketball developed an appreciation of precise passing and backdoor cuts. It also reinforced a conviction that effective leadership and team play flow from sacrifice and selflessness.

And what an inspiration to watch Coach Carril bring Princeton basketball to the NBA (Coach Carril was an assistant coach for the Sacramento Kings after finishing at Princeton in 1996)!

Preparing this homily for a very diverse group of Princeton alumni of all ages helped me to trace the arc of God's providence working in my life through the Princeton experience in a way that resonated with other Princetonians. Little did I know how that arc would further expand just two years later, when Pope Benedict XVI appointed me to be the new bishop of the Diocese of Allentown.

The Spirituality of Sports and my Life as a Priest and Bishop

My background in sports made a significant difference in my life as a young parish priest. I always had a good arm for throwing a football, and in my first assignment, I was quickly nicknamed "Father Elway," after Super Bowl Champion quarterback John Elway, who was legendary for how far and how accurately he could throw downfield. Throwing footballs helped to break the ice and allowed me to talk about not only sports but spirituality as well with younger parishioners.

In my second assignment, we had great basketball games with the fathers of our school students and the students themselves. They were not always used to seeing young priests who were former college basketball players capable of hitting the 22-foot jump shot from the top of the key and threading the needle on a backdoor pass. The games were not only fun and great exercise for the adults, but they opened up many doors of practical evangelization with the families in the parish and school.

When Bishop Michael Saltarelli sent me to study in Rome as a graduate student priest, I played basketball at the North American College seminary on Tuesday afternoons with the seminarians, many of whom have become seminary rectors and priest leaders in their dioceses, and are still my friends. We

enjoyed not only the games and the relief from academic stress that came from the exercise, but the fraternity and camaraderie of being among others who had similar interests. It was a practical lesson of how sports and spirituality can combine.

As the fourth bishop of the Diocese of Allentown, I often talked with young people about playing Princeton basketball. I usually told them that one of the ways the Holy Spirit prepared me to be a point guard in the Catholic Church as their bishop was by leading me to be a JV point guard at Princeton. I talked to them about my athletic crisis and Christ-centered conversion on the Andover varsity basketball team.

As a newly ordained bishop in 2009, I had the equivalent of a baseball card made. On one side is my picture as a bishop, and on the other side is a picture of me as a Princeton JV player at Jadwin Gym, going above the rim for a layup. I know that if, as a CYO basketball player, I had seen a picture of a priest or bishop playing college basketball and rising above the rim, it would have made a profound impression on me.

In the academic year 2009-2010, I gave a copy of that card personally to each of our Catholic elementary school students. All these years later, students still come up, remind me about the card, and tell me that they keep it on the bulletin board above their desk or carry it in their knapsack.

One of my favorite stories involves meeting the mother of a seventh grade boy who installed the card on his bedroom wall between posters of Michael Jordan and LeBron James. We had a great laugh together over that, and I laughed even more later when I imagined myself being dunked on, "posterized," and "facebookfriended" by Michael and LeBron simultaneously on that wall!

One of Princeton's legendary shooters, Frank Sowinski, "the Polish Rifle," said that the card was the best marketing for the priesthood he had ever seen. Speaking publicly about my vocation to the priesthood, I tell young people that just as Peter, James, and John were called by Christ from fishing nets, I was in many ways called by Christ to be a priest from the Princeton University Jadwin Gym basketball court. You could

even say I was called from the nets hanging under the rims of the hoops to the spiritual nets that draw human beings into the barque of Peter, the Catholic Church.

In addition to the card, I conducted a basketball clinic focused on both basketball fundamentals and Catholic faith that we filmed. It has received around 9,000 hits on YouTube. I trust that it has done a lot of good, not just from a basketball point of view, but from a faith one, too.

Bishop Joseph McFadden and Bishop John Barres: Brother Bishops and Brother Point Guards

On May 8, 2013, I had the great privilege of preaching the funeral homily of my close friend Bishop Joseph McFadden, a priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia who became the bishop of the Diocese of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

I can still see us laughing outside of St. Charles Borromeo seminary planning some time together and then the very next morning hearing that he had died suddenly.

I can summarize our friendship and episcopal fraternity in a section from the homily that I delivered at his funeral that describes the conversations we had on the impact of the basketball experience on our Catholic faith and on our episcopal leadership:

The young Joseph McFadden was an excellent student and the valedictorian of his St. Thomas More High School Class.

He also experienced early on what many metro Philadelphia boys have experienced through the generations — a love for Big Five basketball, triple-headers at the Palestra, and the Philadelphia Catholic League.

I can remember one of my own mentors, legendary Princeton basketball coach Pete Carril, saying that he liked to recruit Catholic High School players because “they play to win.”

Make no mistake about it. Joseph McFadden may have been a kind and gentle priest and bishop but he always played to win — whether it was a West Catholic game or whether it was the New Evangelization!

And his way to win as a priest and bishop with a rich interior life and a vibrant missionary spirit was a non-stop full court press for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls.

So many of his basketball experiences, first as a point guard and then as a coach at West Catholic, forged his style of priestly and episcopal leadership.

As a point guard initiating the offense, passing the ball, and creating team chemistry, he would survey the floor, see a lane, and then go very hard to the basket.

It was the same dynamic for him as a bishop of the New Evangelization. He would survey the challenges of spreading the Gospel in the 21st century age of social networking, moral relativism, hedonism and radical atheism.

Then he would find that lane of opportunity, and he would go to the basket hard with a constructive strategy, plan of action, and a spirit of winning and contagious enthusiasm. He was relentless in the best sense.

At the same time, he had this calm, listening, and engaging pastoral spirit that focused prayerfully on the person God put in front of him at a particular moment.

Blessed John Paul II captures Bishop McFadden's spirit in a passage from his book on his life as a bishop entitled *Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way*. He writes: "Interest in others begins with the bishop's prayer life: his conversations with Christ, who entrusts 'His own' to him. Prayer prepares him for encounter with others ... I simply pray for everyone every day.

As soon as I meet people, I pray for them, and this helps me in all my relationships ... I always follow this principle: I welcome everyone as a person sent to me and entrusted to me by Christ.”

Bishop McFadden lived this spirit daily. In the wide range of people he touched and influenced, he welcomed everyone as a person sent and entrusted to him by Christ Himself.

May my friend, brother bishop, and brother point guard rest in peace! He is a daily inspiration.

Final Thoughts

On January 27, 2016, I spoke to the Alvernia University men’s basketball team right before they took the floor and said these words:

The older I get, the more I realize how formative the basketball experience is for you later in life. You put in a lot of hard work and sacrifice on your shooting, ball handling, speed, and court awareness. The development of team chemistry, sacrifice, and generosity — seeing the big picture over the course of a season — is so key to your future career paths, your future marriages and families. There is one thing I want to leave you with tonight: Put Christ at the center of your basketball experience and the development of selfless team chemistry. Play basketball for the glory of God. Be Christ-driven and glory-of-God-driven on the court rather than ego-driven, and our Lord will take your experience of the game of basketball to a whole other beautiful and inspirational level that will impact your destiny and future contributions to the Church and to the world.

I spoke these words from my personal experience of the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and forming me through the

game of basketball. I spoke them from my heart and pastoral experience as a priest and bishop.

I hope that they took root in the souls of those college basketball players who were present. I also hope that they will take root in the souls of those who read this chapter so they might consider striving to lead lives that are not driven by ego but are instead driven by Christ, the glory of God, and the universal call to holiness and mission. They will find that doing so is the key to happiness and fulfillment in this life and eternal life with Christ in the next.

The major concern of a Catholic bishop is to surrender, as a successor of the apostles, to the Holy Spirit in being an instrument for helping to lead souls to Heaven. This became even clearer to me when our Holy Father Pope Francis sent me to be the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, where I was installed on January 31, 2017. Being an “apostolic athlete” for the New Evangelization is a joy and inspiration, and I hope that all those under my spiritual care will participate in the victory celebration with the saints in Heaven.