PRAYER
St. John Damascene defined prayer as “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (CCC, #2950). Because we need to be mindful of God’s presence within the experience of CYO Athletics, prayer is an important part of what takes place at each competitive event. It is the hope that in remembering God’s presence in our program that our actions, on the competitive field and off, will reflect well upon the call of discipleship that we encounter in our baptism and in our participation in the life of the Church. We join together in prayer as competitors because in praying for the “good things” we are not praying for victory but for a fun, growth provoking competition that will incorporate performance to the best of our abilities, good health, good sportsmanship and an experience of fellowship with all who are involved.

PRE-EVENT PRAYER PROTOCOL
All competitions within CYO Athletics should begin in prayer.

Prayer for Grade School/Middle School Sports:
Creator God, as we prepare to play this (game/match), we ask your help and blessing that we may participate to the best of our abilities and with a true spirit of thankfulness so that our efforts give greater glory to you. We ask that you protect us from all injury and guide us in fair play. Help us to respect our opponents as they are our (sisters and/or brothers) also under Your Guidance. For this we pray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Prayer for High School Sports from Knute Rockne:
Dear Lord,
In the struggle that goes on through life we ask for a field that is fair, a chance that is equal with all the strife, the courage to strive and to dare; and if we should win, let it be by the code, with our faith and our honor held high; and if we should lose, let us stand by the road and cheer as the winners go by.
Amen.
While the cross country and track and field meets will begin with the “Prayer to See God in Youth Sports” prior to the start of the meet, the other sports should follow the protocol listed below.

**A Prayer to See God in Youth Sports**

**We pray for young athletes...**
Who through sports, develop important values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship and sharing.

**We pray for coaches...**
Who appreciate the gifts of all players and have respect for the game, who place players before winning and value sportsmanship.

**We pray for parents...**
Who love their children for who they are, not for how they perform.

**We pray for officials...**
Who inspire fair play and protect the integrity of the competition and the participating athletes.

O God, we pray for all who participate in games and meets: May their hearts be open to see your presence in and through sports; may their minds remember the element of fun reflective of your Spirit; may their bodies reflect the gracefulness and wonder of your creation. Let all who compete be enriched by your presence on the course, in the gym, on the field, and on the track.

**PRE-GAME PRAYER**
1. Coaches should discuss prior to gathering their teams when and where the prayer will be led. If the game ahead of you is running late, you do not need to do the prayer on the field or court, but please do it in a centrally located area – the expectation is that we do the prayer and handshake as an entire group not as separate teams;
2. If there is a non-Catholic team competing in the event that day, the players will stand respectfully lined up on their sideline or outside their dugout as the prayer takes place 5 minutes before game time;
3. Players shake hands after the prayer and return to their sideline or their dugout – if a non-Catholic school is participating in the game or match, those players will meet their opponents at midcourt, midfield or home plate for the Sportsmanship Handshake upon completion of the Prayer.

**PRE-EVENT STATEMENT**
In order to set the tone for friendly competition and good sportsmanship, a pre-sport event statement has been developed. It shall be the responsibility of the home team to designate a parent to read the following statement before each contest in CYO Athletics.

*Champions are those that maximize their potential. We need to create the environment in which Champions are made. We will respect and support coaches and officials by remaining in the designated spectator areas. We will remember that youth participate for their enjoyment, not ours. We will remember our role as a fan and applaud good effort by all competitors. We will encourage the athletes to improve their skills, be good teammates, and play by the spirit of CYO Athletics.*
**POST-GAME PLACT BANDS**

In order to reinforce the expression and affirmation of the Cardinal virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance, CYO Athletics has instituted a post-game exchange of “Play Like A Champion Today ®” bands between competing teams and within each team. Resulting discussions about witnessed examples of these core virtues and the values of CYO Athletics may empower young athletes to identify them in each other and themselves.

The goal of the Play Like A Champion Today ® (PLACT) band is to focus attention on virtue among CYO athletes, coaches and families. CYO Athletics strives to develop the “whole” athlete, whom we pray God will strengthen in the Cardinal Virtues of Fortitude, Justice, Prudence and Temperance, manifesting in good sportsmanship, hard work, dedication, and respect for teammates and opponents.

CYO coaches are crucial to the effectiveness of this effort – by setting the right example, communicating clear expectations, and incorporating supportive messaging throughout the season on and off the field/court. Playing like a Champion isn’t always noticed, praised or rewarded by others, so these should not be the primary motivations. What’s more, we are competing with powerful societal messaging that being a star performer and scoring points are the ultimate goals, no matter whether players behave virtuously. However, PLACT bands can be both a reminder to ourselves and an outward sign that in CYO Athletics, we have our priorities straight!

Here are some examples of suitable justifications related to Cardinal virtues for awarding a PLACT band:

- **Fortitude**: exerting maximum physical effort or focus, overcoming adversity, displaying courage, positive focus on/achievement of goals.
- **Justice**: care and concern for all involved in the activity
  - For teammates: encouraging others through supportive behavior, such as high fives or a pat on the back, being kind and inclusive on and off the field/court.
  - For opponents: helping them up off the ground if they fall, extending congratulations for quality play, admitting fault such as having touched the ball last before it went out of bounds.
  - Outward respect and support of referee(s).
- **Prudence**: making wise decisions. Not reacting to overly aggressive or physical play, trash talking. Taking responsibility for teammates and holding ourselves accountable for team play and results.
- **Temperance**: maintaining perspective on winning and losing, remaining enthusiastic and positive throughout the game, playing and competing joyfully, creating fun environment for competition.

From our experience and that of the many CYO coaches who have observed the effectiveness of PLACT bands first-hand, these are suggested best practices:

- Talk with your team at practice and games about virtues and CYO values. Observe players exhibiting virtue, praise it, and point it out to others. Reinforcing these values helps athletes take ownership of them.
- Ask them what they are seeing. Encourage players to do the same with each other, and opponents.
- Wear the band yourself so it is visible (this also helps ensure you don’t forget to bring at least one to each game!) and keep them in your coaching bag.
• Prior to your game/match, check in with the coach of the team you are competing with to discuss any special considerations, such as if there is a particular player who has already received the award and you want to “spread it around,” or if a coach forgot to bring a band and you can provide one for the other team to award.

• During the game/match, ask your players what they are seeing on the court/field. Who is reflecting virtues and CYO values on either team? Make sure they give concrete examples so you can ensure they clearly understand the band’s purpose – this is not a talent or achievement award for the other team’s star player, or whoever scores the most points.

• For the actual exchange, gather the teams briefly in a circle after the postgame handshakes and have your designated team representative(s) share which player(s) they would like to recognize and why. It is fine to recognize multiple players who exhibited good sportsmanship, even if only awarding one the band.

• Exchange can and should take place off the field so that the next games can begin on time.

• If the team you are competing with does not have a band, the exchange should still take place. Have their team acknowledge your player and your team acknowledge their player. Coaches can exchange bands or provide one from their own supply later.

• Jot down notes about what is said about players as this is good info for end of season event.