

## **7 Habits of Spiritually-Focused Leaders: How do we find them in others, especially our youth?**

The Spring 2021 theme at BELIEVES around the habits of spiritually-focused leaders ended on June 8<sup>th</sup> when the final session in the three-part series – “7 Habits of Spiritually-Focused Leaders: How do we find them in others, especially our youth?” – was held featuring Ricky Turner, Athletic Director at Blessed Trinity; and Andy Harlin, Baseball Coach at Blessed Trinity.



Turner, who has been the Athletic Director at Blessed Trinity since 2000, began his career at Blessed Trinity both as the Athletic Director and the Football Coach. Over the years, he’s overseen numerous championships at the school and was named Athletic Director of the Year in 2010.

When asked how prayer exists for him personally, Turner responded, “Being able to work in Catholic schools is special because prayer exists here 24 hours a day. You get to walk around in the workplace and be ‘there’ and it carries over at home too.”

Turner added that he also looks forward to adoration every Thursday night, and that at Blessed Trinity the Eucharist is available for everyone to receive daily because Mass is offered for students and teachers before school each day.”

“Devotionals and praying the rosary have also been very special for me too,” Turner added. “We have had five kids, but 20 years ago we lost our daughter tragically. Praying to Mary and praying the rosary has been huge in getting through that.”

Harlin, who began coaching at St. Pius before coming over to Blessed Trinity and is now returning to coach at St. Pius this year, spoke of how prayer exists for him personally as well.

“For me, everything changed gears when I started working in Catholic schools back in 1989 at St. Pius,” said Harlin, the 10<sup>th</sup> winningest coach in Georgia high school baseball history with a .636 winning percentage. “I remember the very first teen Mass I attended gave me chills. I saw all the kids in their uniforms, and knew it was my calling.”

As important as routine and practice are in sports, how do Turner and Harlin protect themselves from just going through the motions when it comes to prayer?

“We do meet with a priest and do a virtue of the week here,” responded Turner. “The virtue of the week is tied to our ‘sports leader’ program that involves our students, parents, and others. Some other things we do with the kids throughout the year are ‘Rosary Rallies’ and ‘Letters to Mom.’”

Harlin added, “One of the things we do focus on with our kids is intentions. Going into the prayer, we want to explain what the prayer means, but we want to focus and include intentions too to know what is going on in their lives in those moments. When you are coaching, there is a need to remember these are people and their lives. The key is really caring how they’re doing.”

Eric Maust, who was facilitating the session, and was a student-athlete at Blessed Trinity under Turner and Harlin in years past, recalled an anecdote from his time at Blessed Trinity to illustrate Turner and Harlin’s words.

“We were playing in a tournament in Puerto Rico under Coach Harlin, and went to a Mass there,” said Maust. “That has stuck with me ever since and has led me to want to go to a Mass whenever I travel.”

How do Harlin and Turner keep the kids engaged, like Maust spoke of?

“The difference at our school is we have Catholic on the school, and that’s the first of the four pillars here,” Turner answered. “Five years ago, we did a trip to Ireland with our student-athletes and planned the trip around things tied to what Catholic faith is.”

Additionally, Turner said that when they do jersey ceremonies, it is amazing to see what people share.

“People are touched, and at times walk out in tears. Boys sometimes are less sharing than girls with what’s going on for them.”

Harlin followed by saying, “Every kid is different. Our job is to expose kids to as much as possible. For example, with the jersey ceremonies, I don’t know if a kid and his/her parent would have such moments or conversations if the structure from the school wasn’t present.”

Harlin also said, “Things that Coach Turner has done have had an influence on me.”

Turner and Harlin were then asked to comment on habits they see in spiritually-led students.

Commitment is what Turner said first when answering.

“Always doing it the right way,” he added. “If I am preaching that, then I have to do this every day in my own life.”

Harlin followed by speaking about a DVD called *Champions of Faith for Baseball* given to him by Father Tran.

“It’s a one-hour video of players and managers talking about their faith,” Harlin said. “I’ve probably watched this 8,000 times. It has had a huge impact on me every day. For example, Jack McKeon, the former manager of the Marlins, goes to Mass every day wherever he is. He invites players and others to join him, but he doesn’t force them.”

Harlin’s remarks reminded Turner of an experience the two of them had with one of their former players, Tyler Flowers, who went on to play in the Major Leagues.

“One of the most meaningful things for Andy and I was going up to watch Tyler Flowers when he went to play for the Chicago White Sox,” Turner recalled. “He had played football and baseball here at Blessed Trinity. After we had dinner with him, he said he wanted to go to Mass so we did there in the clubhouse with a priest from the Catholic church across the street and it was so memorable.”

Following this reflection, the conversation then shifted back to 2020 and how Harlin and Turner have adjusted.

“Let’s transition back to last year,” asked Maust. “It’s popular to talk about 2020. We are on zoom here, but we used to be in person. How did you infuse what you do via the switch to technology?”

Turner responded, “We used to do everything in person. Now we use zoom. When I think of the seniors last year, what they had to go through was tough. We were loading the bus to go to a game, and five minutes before leaving we find out that one kid tested positive for COVID, so we had to cancel the game. This happened week after week. The kids had to protect their families from getting sick.”

Harlin added, “It opened doors from a communication standpoint and caused things to slow down to spend time with family that might not have happened. In the grand scheme of things, it will be a small sliver of their lives. Life is full of speed bumps.”

Harlin and Turner were then asked how they engaged their student-athletes in spiritual stuff during the pandemic.

“Our coaches would call the kids, send emails, have zoom meetings, and more,” replied Turner. “Andy gave a practice shirt to the kids with their names and numbers on them if they’d gone through missing the season in 2020. That had a huge impact for everyone.”

Harlin and Turner added further color by sharing that part of their efforts to stay in touch with the kids included zoom meetings on different topics that included baseball, diversity, and more; holding banquets via zoom; and continuing to honor people for how important they were and were to Blessed Trinity.

With all that had been shared, there was still time for one more question before the session closed, which CTK Parishioner Tim Doyle posed.

“How do you incorporate service in what you do?” he asked.

“All our teams do a service activity, like the volleyball team that does a tournament each year to raise funds for a cause,” said Turner. “The football team does three activities each year, such as one related to North Fulton Community Charities, or another to serve 14 kids who don’t have families and are in foster care.”

Hearing this Maust, who again had been a student-athlete at Blessed Trinity in the past summarized, “They create the platform and extend the invitation.”