



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Other News

Athletica Vaticana among the promoters of the “Via Pacis” Roman half-marathon and the Run for Peace race

For the first time, at the third edition of the *Via Pacis* and of the Run for Peace, the name “Athletica Vaticana” will appear among the promoters – alongside *Roma Capitale* and FIDAL. The official athletics representative of the Holy See will thus take the place of the Pontifical Council for Culture, to which it has been entrusted by the Secretariat of State and of which it is an expression in international sports.

“In this way the institutional structure of the *Via Pacis* becomes more homogeneous: alongside *Roma Capitale*, the event will be convened by two “national” sports institutions, the Italian one, Fidal, and the Vatican one”, explains Monsignor Melchor Sánchez de Toca, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture and president of Athletica Vaticana. “For the *Via Pacis*”, he adds, “the first sports association established in the Vatican will assume the functions and tasks hitherto carried out by the Pontifical Council for Culture”.

The “white and yellow” runners will be accompanied at the starting line in Via della Conciliazione by representatives of the Vatican Gendarmerie, the Pontifical Swiss Guard, the Vatican Dispensary of Santa Marta (where poor families are assisted) and many offices of the Holy See, starting with the Secretariat of State, especially in the non-competitive Run for Peace. And there will also be the young migrants welcomed by the Auxilium cooperative in the “Better World” Centre in Rocca di Papa. “An impassioned participation, to bear witness in the streets of Rome to the genuine openness to dialogue and friendship with all”, added Monsignor Sánchez de Toca.

With this step on the occasion of the *Via Pacis*, Athletica Vaticana relaunches its presence alongside sportspeople from all over the world, also through spirituality, solidarity and culture. From 1 January 2019 the first Vatican team will participate officially in running events, by virtue of the Bilateral Agreement between the Holy See and the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI); the agreement was signed on 11 September 2018 by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and by Giovanni Malagò, president of CONI.

Athletica Vaticana is affiliated to the Italian Athletics Federation (FIDAL), by virtue of the Bilateral Agreement

with CONI. In addition, it is affiliated to the Italian Federation of Paralympic and Experimental Sports (FISPES), with a view also to an understanding with the Italian Paralympic Committee (Comitato CIP) – with whom a Protocol of Understanding has already been signed, on 19 December 2018, to re-launch together a project, also cultural, for the inclusion of people with disabilities through sport. The guided tours of the Vatican Museums for visually-impaired sportspeople and the formation of athlete-guides also fall within this context.

The aim of *Athletica Vaticana* is not only professional: it is committed to re-launching genuine Christian witness, with spiritual, fraternal and cultural initiatives, in the world of athletics and sport in general. For this reason, it has as honorary members two young Muslim migrants and two young people with disabilities who are supported in inclusion through sport.

The idea of constituting *Athletica Vaticana* was born spontaneously from the encounter between many Vatican workers who run, especially in the morning before going to work, alongside the Tiber in the area near Saint Peter's. The Secretariat of State provided a suitable and entirely innovative legal form to this community of friends, to offer Christian witness on the streets, quite literally "outbound" as Pope Francis asks, among the women and men who live the passion of sport.

In total there are around seventy athletes who form part of the Association in various ways. The youngest is 19 years old (a Swiss Guard), and the least young is 62 (a professor of the Vatican Apostolic Library). In the team there are Swiss Guards alongside Gendarmes, firemen, workers, printers, carpenters, journalists, professors, and officials from the various technical and economic services. There are also workers from the Vatican Pharmacy, the Vatican Museums, the Pontifical Villas, the *Osservatore Romano* and the Secret Archive. There are also various priest-runners, active in the fields of culture, ecumenism, attention to the family and the value of life, as well as in the parishes, in missionary activity and in the Secretariat of State. There is even a bishop.

Particularly significant is the presence of women (there is also a nun): running, moreover, is a sport that increasingly sees women as protagonists.

Eighteen nationalities are represented, confirming the universality of the Holy See,

Both on the streets and on the track, *Athletica Vaticana* continues to be a key actor in many initiatives of solidarity, promoted in collaboration with the Apostolic Almoner and the Vatican Dispensary of Santa Marta, always on Pope Francis' behalf. Also worthy of mention was the ecumenical twinning with the German running team of Wittemberg, the city of Luther: in May thirty "Vatican athletes" were in Germany to confirm this significant sporting connection.

Another *Athletica Vaticana* project is the creation of a network of "Marathon Runner's Masses", celebrated the evening before the great international Marathons. Rome, Florence and Valencia are now consolidated appointments, twinned with the historic celebrations in the Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and with Vienna. For these occasions *Athletica Vaticana* has composed the "Marathon Runner's Prayer", translating it into 37 languages and making it available to everyone. Images with the text of the "Prayer" are distributed at the competitions. The "Pope's Marathon Runners" are about to take this witness to many international events, starting with Berlin and Valencia, and then in 2020, London, Krakow, Jerusalem and New York.

It is with an open and inclusive style that *Athletica Vaticana* intends to be present in a concrete way alongside the athletes. It aims, with small steps, also to take part in some international events, following the natural universal vocation of the Holy See. In this way it is going forward in the process of becoming part of the international sports institutions. Meanwhile, in May, the Vatican Representative was invited to Montenegro for the Small European States' Games (states with less than one million inhabitants are able to participate). And in June 2020, in the Republic of San Marino, *Athletica Vaticana* will be on track for the Championships of the Small States of Europe.

Finally, another significant objective is participation in the Mediterranean Games (in 2021 in Oran, Algeria and then in 2026 in Taranto). It is an ideal international event for bearing witness to peace, in the wake of the

symbolic gesture that opened, in February 2018, the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang: the consignment of the Athletica Vaticana shirt to the representatives of world sport, taking Pope Francis' message of peace and reconciliation to the representatives of the two Koreas.

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