

## FEATURE

## Kuhn on deck to speak at St. Jude's in Gates

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Former baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn generally goes to bat for professional athletes who publicly proclaim their faith.

Kuhn, who led Major League Baseball from 1969 to 1984, praises the practice of players from opposing teams kneeling together and praying on the field as often occurs after games in the National Football League. And he supports athletes who mention their faith in Jesus when being interviewed by a sports reporter.

"I admire the overtness of evangelicals, particularly, in proclaiming their faith," Kuhn said during a telephone interview from his home in Jacksonville, Fla. "I'm happy to see Catholic ballplayers cross themselves as they go to bat."

Kuhn also evangelizes on behalf of the Catholic faith, as he will do during a talk about the lay apostolate Tuesday, Feb. 19, at 7 p.m. at St. Jude the Apostle Church, 4100 Lyell Ave., Gates. His talk is sponsored by the St. Michael the Archangel Chapter of Call to Holiness, an international Catholic lay organization whose purpose is to "defend and support the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, through prayer, education and evangelization." The group, which claims about 150 members in the Diocese of Rochester, holds meetings the first Monday of each month at St. Jude's.

Although Kuhn admires athletes who thank God for their success, he said he doesn't think God takes sides in athletic competition.

"I'm sure he doesn't care about the Yankees," Kuhn said with a laugh, referring to baseball's winningest franchise. "I think he's neutral, at least."

Then again, Kuhn may not believe God loves the Yankees because he's a fan of the Boston Red Sox, who last won a World Series when Woodrow Wilson was president. Kuhn personally witnessed the Red Sox lose the 1975 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds, in seven games many commentators to this day consider



Former Major League Baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn was a 1999 guest on the syndicated television program "Personally Speaking," which was hosted by Msgr. Jim Lisante.

Joe Sinnott/CNS

the greatest World Series ever. Kuhn was on hand in Fenway Park in Boston to see Carlton Fisk's game-ending home run save the Red Sox from elimination in the sixth game.

"If you had had the power to call it after six games, you would have, because nobody should have won that series," he said, adding that last year's equally dramatic series between the Yankees and the Arizona Diamondbacks "may have been as good a series as I ever saw."

Kuhn still enjoys getting out to the ballpark, and regularly attends minor-league games in Jacksonville. He's also a board member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y. Since he left the commissioner's office, however, he has spent more and more time evangelizing for his faith. He said he found this new vocation after being asked to give a talk on the

Lord's Prayer during a retreat. The talk was well-received and, from then on, he began exploring his Catholic faith more deeply, he said.

"I've always been a Sunday church-going Catholic," he said. "I've only become a public spokesman in the past 10 or 15 years as I've had more time on my hands to pursue spiritual things."

Kuhn said a late cousin, Ida Waring, was a Daughter of Charity who took the religious name of Sister Martha. She had an influence on his faith, not the least because she regularly gave him cards picturing St. Jude, patron of hopeless cases, he said.

"I guess she viewed me that way," he said with a laugh. He noted that he was born on Oct. 28, St. Jude's feast day, and was pleased to be informed that he would be speaking at St. Jude's in this diocese.

Kuhn said his talk at St. Jude's will fo-

cus on *Duc In Altum* — "Put out into the deep," (Luke 5:4) — the concluding section of Pope John Paul II's 2001 apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium"). Issued at the end of the Year of the Great Jubilee 2000, the letter exhorted lay Catholics to answer the universal call to holiness.

Kuhn said he has tried to embody the church's call for lay Catholics to become holy by adhering to his faith, including sticking to his moral guns during his reign as commissioner.

"Even when I was in the world ... I never felt that I was bound to do things against my conscience," he said. "I was never afraid to stand against the crowd when that served a purpose."

He recalled, for example, that some people within the baseball establishment didn't want him to suspend players who had been found to be using illegal drugs. But Kuhn thought it was important to do so because children look up to athletes, and he wanted to send a message that athletes weren't above the law.

He also banned Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays from working in baseball when they took employment in the casino industry. Although he said neither former player was doing anything wrong, he thought it was important that baseball not be associated with any kind of gambling.

Today, Kuhn said that labor-management tensions threaten baseball's future and he would like to see a commissioner — jointly elected by players and owners — who could serve as a final arbiter of disputes. However, he said he doubted such a scenario would happen.

Regarding society, Kuhn said Catholics need to realize that "the apostolate is not something for priests alone and leaders alone — it is for everyone."

"The culture is sick," he said. "We are called to go out and change that."

**EDITORS' NOTE:** For information on Kuhn's talk at St. Jude's, call Vivian Ripton at 585-387-9662 or St. Jude's at 585-247-4322.

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