

# Albert Pujols' Field of Faith

✘ It's not quite March yet, but today is an unseasonably warm spring-like day. I'm a huge baseball fan, so that's got me thinking about the upcoming season.

I saw my first big league game in 1979 at the Astrodome where I became a life-long fan of the sport and devoted follower of the Houston Astros. Guys like Jose Cruz, Craig Reynolds, Nolan Ryan, Craig Biggio, Jeff Bagwell and current stars Lance Berkman and Roy Oswalt are just a few of my favorite players to don many variations of the Houston uniform.

If you know anything about baseball, you know that one of Houston's fiercest rivalries is the St. Louis Cardinals. My brother-in-law Denton is a big Cards fan so we have some interesting conversations like a few years back when I said, "You've got to admit, it would be cool to see Biggio and Bagwell get a World Series title before they retire," to which he replied in his classic deadpan voice, "No."

I used to be pretty serious about my sports devotion too, until I started working with ministries like Fellowship of Christian Athletes and began developing sports projects that helped pro and college athletes share their stories as a mode of evangelism and outreach. I still have my favorite teams, but now I find myself rooting for individual athletes just as much as anything.

One person in particular is Albert Pujols-the first baseman for the previously mentioned Cardinals. When he steps up to the plate against my 'Stros in a key at bat during a late season stretch, I cringe knowing that he can single-handedly kill my team's chances at the postseason with one swing. But I'm also conflicted because I know how amazing this guy is off the field and what kind of solid Christian example he's living for his teammates, his coaches and his fans to see.

Late in the 2008 season, I had the privilege of interviewing Pujols for an FCA series published by Regal Books. He was featured in the title *Excellence* that releases in early March. Pujols is originally from the Dominican Republic but is now a legalized American citizen. He is just as passionate about his relationship with Christ as he is passionate about helping his team succeed.

"I'm growing in the Word right now and God is showing me things," he told me. "If I hadn't accepted Christ when I first started playing baseball, I don't know where I would be right now."

Pujols' legendary work ethic combined with his jaw-dropping natural ability has provided a massive platform that only the world's most elite athletes usually enjoy. He's taken his success and used it to create the Albert Pujols Family Foundation that, among other things, assists the needs of impoverished families in his home country. Pujols is also very involved in reaching out to families with special needs children. This is a personal plight for him as the adopted father of a Down syndrome daughter (Isabella) whom was the child of his wife Diedre (who before their marriage was a single mother).

Pujols does his best to live by the words found in 1 Corinthians 15:58 in which the Apostle Paul says, "be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (HCSB)

That scripture is an appropriate analogy for Pujols who is steady as a rock along the right corner of the infield and an immovable force behind the plate. And while some think the imposing athlete is soft-spoken, they might be surprised to learn that he is very vocal about his faith in some unlikely places-most notably from his post at first base.

Back in 2006, his good friend (and author of One Thing You

Can't Do In Heaven) Mark Cahill challenged him to share his faith with teammates and opposing players. So Pujols took the suggestion and began doing something quite out of the ordinary. When a player would get a base hit, he would ask them "What do you think is going to happen to you when you die?" or "If you died today, where do you think you're going to go?"

"You'd be surprised how many people I witnessed to at first base," Pujols said. "Some of them were Christians and I encouraged them to do the same thing at their position or in the dugout with their teammates. There were some that would say their family was the most important thing in their life or money or baseball and I'd say, 'You're wrong.' Then I would grab one of Mark's books and send it to them and if I had the time before batting practice, I'd try to spend some time with them and try to witness to them."

Talk about putting yourself out there. Many athletes are afraid to let people know where they're coming from for fear of alienation or negative reaction. But an increasing number of these talented men and women are boldly standing up for Christ despite social pressure to do otherwise.

Pujols has openly embraced the philosophy presented in Hebrews 13:15-16 which says, "Therefore, through Him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name. Don't neglect to do good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices." (HCSB)

Most of those reading this are not in the position to witness to famous athletes, but we are all in a position to share the love of God with those around us. When I think about my fear of evangelism-whether it be lifestyle driven or from a traditional witnessing model-it's challenging to think about a guy like Pujols who has nothing to gain and everything to lose by sharing his faith so boldly with his peers.

So next time you feel like God is calling you to bravely “confess His name” in the workplace, in social settings or in the general public-and that feeling is accompanied by a host of butterflies in your stomach-think about Albert Pujols standing on first base in the middle of a Major League Baseball game sharing his faith with a bunch of tough, hard-nosed athletes who may or may not appreciate the approach.

Maybe this evangelism thing isn't so hard after all. I mean, if a baseball player can do it, what's my excuse?

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## James Dobson Resigns



**Feb. 27, 2009** – James Dobson resigned on Friday as board chairman of the conservative Christian group Focus on the Family.

The announcement was made on Focus on the Family's radio broadcast, which Dobson will continue to host. Dobson told fellow board members on Wednesday and informed the 950 Focus employees Friday morning at a staff worship service, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

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# Fred Price Names Son Pastor

*After 35 years of leading a faith movement, Fred Price will step aside March 15 to install his son, Fred Price Jr., as senior pastor of Crenshaw Christian Center (CCC) in Los Angeles.*

✘ **Feb. 27, 2009** – Fred Price, founder of one of the nation’s first black megachurches and an icon of the faith movement, will step aside on March 15 to install his son, Fred Price Jr., as senior pastor of Crenshaw Christian Center (CCC) in Los Angeles.

“The formal succession of my son will take place on his 30th birthday, the same day Jesus began his ministry,” said the elder Price, who still plans to teach periodically. “This wasn’t planned, it just happened that way. I believe that it’s a sign from God that after six years of training as an assistant pastor, Freddie is ready to sit in the driver’s seat and I will be there to help him along his way.”

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# Pentecostalism Still Burns

*An annual report released this week about church growth highlights two Pentecostal denominations as the only faith groups of traditional Christian orthodoxy that increased church membership.*

✘ **Feb. 26, 2009** – While membership in the nation’s largest Christian communions declined last year, two Pentecostal denominations showed an increase.


The Assemblies of God (AG) of Springfield, Mo., and the

Cleveland, Tenn.-based Church of God were the only two denominations of traditional Christian orthodoxy among the 25 largest churches in the U.S. to report membership increases, according to the 2009 edition of the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, an annual chronicle of religious institutions edited by the National Council of Churches (NCC) and published by Abingdon.

The AG listed nearly 2.9 million members while the Church of God reported 1 million.

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## Your B.I.G. Dreams

Well, today is the first day of the rest of your life,  right? Let's invest the remainder wisely.

If you are reading these words, know this, we have already been, and will continue to be praying for you, our readers. No hollow promises or lip service. No good intentions unfulfilled. You can absolutely count on it.

Now let's talk about what I want you to consider right this minute. But **do me a favor, in the busyness of your day, please find a way to engage your heart, otherwise, with your mind alone, you will miss what I am saying – guaranteed.** Reading this would then just be another mental exercise, part of the blur of another seemingly average day filled with too much information. *Hearts engage!*

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# Pro-Life Bills Advance

*North Dakota's personhood bill, which defines a fertilized egg as a person, is one of several pro-life measures to make state-level gains.*

✘ **Feb. 27 2009** – Pro-life legislation advanced in several states this week.

On Wednesday, the Arizona House Health and Human Services Committee unanimously endorsed a Republican-sponsored bill that would require a pre-abortion waiting period and mandatory disclosures to women seeking abortions, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

The measure also includes a “right of conscience” provision that allows pharmacists and health care providers to refuse to participate in abortions or emergency contraception if they object on moral grounds.

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# Teens Fast to Relieve World Hunger

*As tens of thousands of teens prepare to fundraise through fasting this weekend, the results of a new study reveal most teens are charity-minded, and that the current U.S. recession is only helping to boost their awareness.*

✘ **Feb. 26, 2009** – Countering perceptions that today's youth are selfish and lazy, hundreds of thousands of teens from 7,000 youth groups will fast, pray, fundraise and serve neighbors in need this weekend to raise awareness about world

hunger.

The 30-Hour Famine, an initiative of World Vision, comes days after the results of a new study show that more teens volunteer for charitable causes than their parents do. "The stereotype that teens are selfish and lazy is not an uncommon perception, but I'd say it's probably not true," said Pat Rhoads, national director of the 30-Hour Famine.

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## **Bluetree:           Worship           From Ireland**

✘ Although Bluetree has been together for about five years, their song "God of This City" is likely to be more familiar than the band itself. But with their new CD release on March 3, people have the chance to hear more from this worship band. Aaron Boyd (lead vocals/guitar), Andy McCann (bass), Pete Kernaghan (deejay) and Johnny Hobson (drums), all hailing from Belfast, Ireland, feel that they are called to lead worship, "to be creating songs and music that help people," Boyd says.

But what kind of a name is Bluetree? Boyd explains that when the group was deciding on a name, they were thinking about how Christians are to be salt and light, they are called to be different. "The simple concept of having a blue tree in a forest would stand out. A blue tree would be different; a blue tree would not be the run of the mill green tree, brown bark. ... And if you've seen a blue tree, you'd look at it, it would be a bit different than the rest and you would take a bit more notice of that tree."

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# What to Do on Your Worst Day

Imagine going bankrupt, having your house burned down and discovering your family has been kidnapped by terrorists—all in one day. Wouldn't that be the worst day of your life? That's what happened to David around 1012 B.C., when he lived in the village of Ziklag (see 1 Sam. 30).

The biblical account says that while David and his men were away in Aphek, their enemies, the Amalekites, ransacked their village, stole all their goods and kidnapped all the women and children. To make matters worse, David's men blamed him and threatened to stone him.

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# Know Your Assignment, Know Your Value

You are valued in the place where you are assigned! In this place of assignment people will celebrate your worth. Your efforts will be acknowledged and rewarded.

You must realize that you are not just another number. No two snowflakes are alike. No two fingerprints are the same. There is no other person just like you.

Because you are unique you have an assignment that only you can fulfill. Guard your gift, therefore, and use your talents for those who value what you have to offer. Your life is too valuable to waste it in places where you are tolerated rather

than celebrated. Find your assignment and you will find people who value and celebrate you!