

Is Major League Baseball Redeeming Itself in the Eyes of Christians?

On the heels of the Los Angeles Dodgers' fiasco with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, it appears as if the Dodgers—and many other Major League Baseball teams—are redeeming themselves in the eyes of Christians.

The Dodgers celebrated the LGBTQ community in June with a Pride Night at the ballpark. The event drew a great deal of backlash from the Christian community. Last Sunday, however, the Dodger organization's Christian Faith and Family Day gave believers something to cheer about, and a reason to come back to the stadium.

In a recent article, revealed that the Dodgers are one of at least 18 of MLB's 30 teams—a total of 60%—who will host faith events during the 2023 season.

"We like the Dodgers, but we also wanted to support the fact that they're promoting Christianity," Cindy Carcedo, whose family of five came to the game, told the news site. "I feel like our faith is so strong, but to hear it coming from the players and knowing that we're all in this together, it just makes it so much stronger."

"It's really nice to see them talking about Christ and God in public, just spreading the word," Cindy's husband Sergio said. "Nowadays, I believe a lot of people that are Christian try to hide it. So, this is a very good thing."

After the Dodgers lost to the Cincinnati Reds, thousands of fans stuck around for a special postgame program on Christian Faith and Family Day, highlighted by a performance by contemporary Christian music artist Jeremy Camp.

San Diego's Petco Park was another facility that recently hosted a faith and family Night. San Diego Padres and visiting Texas Rangers' fans gathered to celebrate their faith openly.

A former NFL star turned pastor—Miles McPherson of The Rock Church in San Diego—led the crowd in worship.

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With these events and other advertising efforts, MLB has signaled a broader effort to integrate faith with the national pastime.

The "He Gets Us" campaign, which spent \$20 million during the Super Bowl to reach millions, is now sponsoring faith events in several MLB cities. Jordan Carson, a campaign spokesperson, emphasized the campaign's goal to "reintroduce people to the Jesus of the Bible and His confounding love and forgiveness."

Beyond Christianity, baseball has also accommodated other religious groups with events like Muslim Heritage Nights.

The Dodgers' decision to honor the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence during its Pride Night game earlier this season indeed stirred controversy. It also led one of the team's star pitchers and future Hall of Famer Clayton Kershaw to urge the promotion of Christian Faith and Family Day at Dodger Stadium.

The Dodgers showcased this event across their social media channels, but the idea is still not without its concerns. Some fans lamented about a lack of similar events for other religious groups, like Jewish Community Day.

While occasional challenges may arise, faith nights remain a pivotal tradition in baseball.

Faith Night History

The roots of faith nights can be traced back to the 1950s when “Inter-Faith Night” games aimed to promote pluralism among Protestant, Catholic and Jewish believers during the height of the Cold War.

The contemporary iteration of faith nights, featuring Christian music and player testimonials, emerged in 1991. Judy Boen, a devoted St. Louis Cardinals fan, organized the first Christian Family Day at Busch Stadium.

Now 81, Boen is no longer involved with the event in St. Louis. But her daughter, Christe Boen Mirikitani, says her mother’s pioneering idea met with some resistance more than three decades ago, but it caught on—much to her mother’s delight.

“She loves Jesus with all her heart, and she loves Cardinals baseball—that’s a close second. I had been babysitting for a bunch of different baseball players, and my mom knew that a lot of them had a faith in Christ.”

Over the decades, this event has continued to thrive, paving the way for players to share their faith publicly. Albert Pujols, an iconic player who retired in 2022, paid special tribute to Judy at last year’s Cardinals faith day, exemplifying the unity between faith and baseball.

In these turbulent times, when Christians are often persecuted for their faith, MLB teams are offering a ray of hope. They remind us that faith has a place in the public sphere and that, as Sergio Carcedo aptly puts it, “we’re all in this together.” {eoa}

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