

To Build a Peaceful and Better World

Representatives of the nations of the world marched into the empty Olympic stadium in Tokyo, Japan. They proudly carried the flags of their respective countries. The athletes waved to the cameras, which broadcasted the opening ceremony around the world. The wave was a gesture of national pride, but the atmosphere was of friendship with people of different cultures worldwide. Aren't we at a time when we need greater cultural understanding and a peaceful world?

The Olympic Games has changed over time. The original games were first held in the 8th century B.C., in Olympia, Greece. Athletic competitions were held every four years for 12 centuries but then banned by Emperor Theodosius I. It wasn't until 1896, 1,503 years later, that the games resumed. The 1896 creed read, "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." The rebirth of the games was about participation and not conquest.

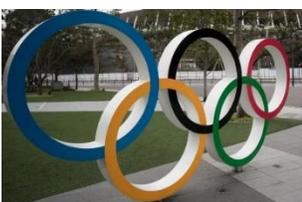


Time and conflict have changed our world to the opposite of the original creed. The emphasis on triumph increased. Beginning in 1988, the Olympic Games started allowing all athletes to compete, and not just amateur athletes. Two World Wars and many military conquests later, the world needed the hope of peace that the Olympics represent. The mission of the *Olympic Spirit* is "to build a peaceful and better world ... which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play.

The Olympic Games, in its purest form, is a respite from a world in turmoil. It is a time to put aside our differences and come together in peace, fellowship, and sport. I personally enjoy the symbolism of the closing ceremony, when athletes enter the stadium, not as nations divided, but as cultures mixed together. The Olympic games have sought to bring nations together in peace, even if only for the two weeks of competition. The bible urges us to seek unity through peace. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he wrote: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).*

As Christians, we look towards the long-term future over short-term results. On earth, Christians seek unity, peace, and a better world. Our goal, however, is much bigger -- that of eternal life. By following God's guidance, we can make this world -- God's creation -- a better place. Let us strive towards a peaceful and better world here on earth and an eternity of joy in heaven.

Prayer: Dear Lord. We pray for a peaceful Olympic Games and a spirit that promotes peace, unity, and a better world. Amen.



Did you know: As a symbol of unity of purpose, the colors (blue, green, yellow, black, and red) of the five Olympic rings were chosen because at least one of the colors appears in every national flag of the world. The rings are interlocked, representing the five inhabited continents (Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas) at the time of its design (1913). Each circle is equal in size and dimension.