

# Chaplain sees humility in Indianapolis Colts

BROWNSBURG, Ind. – The Indianapolis Colts had just completed a 38-34 heart-pounding victory Jan. 21 that would send them to the Super Bowl Feb. 4 in Miami.

Team owner Jim Irsay and head coach Tony Dungy stood on a stage at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis to receive the Lamar Hunt Trophy as the NFL's American Football Conference champions.

At that moment – arguably the greatest in the history of the Colts' franchise since its move to Indianapolis in 1984 – both men expressed thanks and praise to God.

Standing nearby, Father J. Peter Gallagher, the Colts' chaplain, appreciated their words.

"I was grateful that (Irsay) said that and I thought, 'Man, thank you,'" said Father Gallagher. He said his and Mr. Dungy's words echoed "what Tony has said all along and what a lot of these guys really do live, that is, gratitude to God."

After the awards ceremony, the players made their way to their locker room, where Father Gallagher said Mr. Dungy called them to prayer.

"Tony said, 'We've got to finish like we've finished every game and just like we started,'" Father Gallagher told The Criterion, newspaper of the Indianapolis Archdiocese. "So we got everybody (together) and huddled down and I said, 'Heavenly Father, there are two words we want to offer you: thanks and praise.'"

St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, where Father Gallagher is an associate pastor, is just minutes away from the Colts' headquarters on the west side of Indianapolis. "I'm fortunate to have been asked to be a part of this organization and what I'm doing to promote our Catholic faith," he said about his volunteer ministry.

"My prayers before and after the game are about humbleness for the gifts that God has given us, and to share those gifts and to use those gifts one day at a time and

one game at a time," he said.

Father Gallagher's team chaplain position has contributed to excitement about the team among parishioners.

On the morning of the AFC Championship game, after a few inches of snow had fallen overnight, he joked with the congregation at the end of the 9 a.m. Mass. "If any of you would like to be on the sideline this evening in my place, let me know," he said. "I just want to stay here and admire the pretty snow."

Then Father Gallagher paused for a moment, smiled and said, "Nah."

Seated in the front row at the Mass was parishioner Jennie Miller, who wore a pink Colts shirt for the occasion.

"My dad was a semipro football player up in Chicago," she said. "So anything involved in football is exciting for me. To have someone so closely involved with our local team is great."

"I'm just thrilled and excited about him going (to the Super Bowl)," said Robert Alerding, a member of St. Matthew Parish in Indianapolis. "It's almost as exciting as if I was going."

He is a resident of Marquette Manor, a retirement community, where Father Gallagher celebrates Mass for Catholic residents twice a week.

Father Gallagher, who also is chaplain for Cardinal Ritter Junior/Senior High School and its football team, which lost by one point in the Class 1A state football championship game in November.

He called the work of chaplains in athletics "a way of evangelizing."

"The number of (Colts) players who are practicing their faith a little more intentionally now has grown, even through this season," he said.

As Ritter's chaplain he celebrated Mass for the high school team before many of their Friday evening games and would lead them in prayer just before kickoff and after the games.

Ritter junior Luke Floyd, a tight end and outside linebacker on the school's football team and a member of St. Malachy Parish, said the message of being humble about his athletic gifts is important to him. Ultimately it helped the team – which has played in the state finals three of the past four years – to be successful, he said.

“If one person thinks he’s better than others on the team, then he probably won’t practice as hard,” said Luke. “So then if one guy does it, then maybe more guys will follow. Then the games go that way (too).”

“We’re trying to make sure we establish that Catholic identity,” said Ritter Coach Ty Hunt, “(and remember) what’s best for the community and trying to make sure that things are done for the greater good.”