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Catholic church: Pray for the woeful Canadiens

From staff and wire reports

Updated 14h 36m ago

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It's come to this for the Montreal Canadiens: The Catholic church is asking people to pray for the last-place NHL team.

The church has placed an ad in Montreal newspapers in hopes of an eighth-place finish and a spot in the playoffs. The ad shows the Eastern Conference standings with every team listed except the Canadiens. In eighth place, the final playoff spot, it simply says "Prions," French for Let Us Pray.

The Canadiens (21-24-9, 51 points) are last in the Northeast Division, and in second-to-last-place in the 15-team Eastern Conference.

STANDINGS: NHL team records, points PHOTOS: The Montreal Canadiens in pictures

Faced with declining church attendance, the Archdiocese of Montreal is known for its clever campaigns to solicit funds each year. The one-time ad was designed by local firm Bos advertising and appeared in French-language newspapers on Thursday.

"You know, the Catholic church doesn't have the same means as other advertisers, so they need to make an impact," Hugo Leger, vice-president of Bos told The Canadien Press.

The firm says it has long been considering an ad that combines Quebec's two major religions — Catholicism and the secular passion of ice hockey.

According to TSN, Leger said when people get past the joke, they will find a simple message that encourages prayer.

"We just want to remind people that the church exists," Leger said. "And when we say pray, that could mean for the Canadiens, or an invitation to pray in general."

The church has a recent history of using a popular issue to get some attention. Last April, it installed a billboard visible from the crumbling Champlain Bridge that urged motorists to, "say your prayers."

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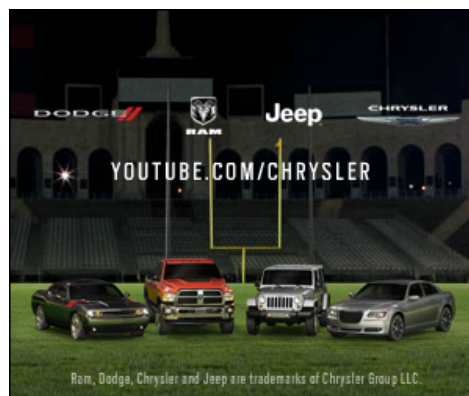


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The billboard attracted public attention as the media were reporting almost daily about the need for a new bridge to replace the aging Montreal structure.

Thursday's ad was described as a one-shot deal; the spots were scheduled to appear in two French-language daily newspapers, for one day only.

A spokeswoman for the archdiocese says Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte saw the advertising pitch just a few days ago.

"He immediately accepted and loved the concept," said Lucie Martineau. It was a concept that allows us to be right there with what the people are preoccupied with right now, and send them a little message to pray for the Canadiens."

The Canadiens had high hopes entering the season, but the year has been marred by injuries, notably to top defensemen Andrei Markov and captain Brian Gionta, and by the worst power play in the league. The coach was fired, and the choice of replacement — non-French-speaking Randy Cunneynworth — prompted a protest outside the Bell Centre. The Canadiens would-be sniper, Michael Cammalleri, was traded to Calgary after disparaging what he described as the team's losing attitude.

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Dan Cusiter · Top Commenter
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