



Discipleship rises from destruction

Joe Maggelet inspires success in sports and in life despite turbulent past

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The noise was painful. It was harsh. There was no love in the those words. No forgiveness. No compassion. There was only one intent – to tear one another down. He could not take it much longer. He’s heard it too many times before and now he wants to disappear. He knows he cannot physically escape the stronghold of foul language and corrupt behavior—he was born into—so he finds his get-away through the window in his bedroom. As he peered out the window, he sees the neighborhood’s “big boys” dribbling, passing and rebounding at the court across the street. He watches for hours after the street light turns on, just like the cop that stood on the corner keeping an eye out for those basketball-playing “big boys.”

Someday, he wants to be like those big boys and flee the house of destruction that holds him captive. Maybe someday, he will be able to put the ball between his legs and avoid a blocking defender with a double-clutch up-and-under layup. Maybe someday, he would use his infatuation with the court to alleviate the sting of a painful upbringing. For Ashland University Chaplain Joe Maggelet, this is the reality he was engulfed in as a child growing up in the inner city of Bridgeport, Conn.

“There’s a fire that gets through your soul in athletics, and for kids who come from bad backgrounds, like me, it was also a place to hide myself,” Maggelet confessed. Maggelet said he looked to athletics in his early years as an outlet to avoid the pattern of gang violence and dysfunction that plagued his family. He broke the chain of this destructive behavior and used his upbringing to guide people that have experienced similar circumstances through scripture.

Over the past 27 years, Maggelet has mentored, discipled, encouraged, and supported Ashland University athletes with one goal in mind. “Success is the number one thing,” Maggelet said. “I want to see people become successful in life, not just as athletes going out there and performing.”

Success through Maggelet’s lens does not follow the pattern of excess material possession, but it focuses on executing the plan of a higher being.

“Success is the progressive realization and internalization of all God wants me to be and do,” Maggelet said.

With this goal of success, for over a quarter century Maggelet has made his mark on the university and extended his hand to all Ashland University athletes regardless of their religious affiliation.

“If you’re an athlete and you go to Ashland University, you know who Joe Maggelet is even if you’re not a Christian,” Ashland University Women’s Basketball senior Andi Daugherty said.

Maggelet is the head pastor of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) on campus, he also disciple’s a hand-selected group of individuals on each athletic team and teaches them how to lead a bible study for their teammates.

“I’m not really sure you can put Joe Maggelet in words,” Daugherty said, “He’s not only a great mentor, or a great spiritual leader on campus for me, but for thousands of athletes over the years.”

Maggelet holds discipleship and mentorship at a high priority con-



TOM PUSKAR, TIMES GAZETTE.COM

Maggelet prays for senior Andi Daugherty prior to tip-off at the Elite 8 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

sidering it was the developmental support he lacked while growing up with a neglectful father.

“I think the biggest struggles have come from learning how to do this well for young men, especially my own boys, when I didn’t have a dad,” Maggelet said.

As a child, Maggelet was exposed to the rapid gang related activity that was prevalent in his Bridgeport, Conn. community.

A migration to Seminole, Fla. enabled Maggelet to deepened his moral values by separating him from the corrupting environment he grew up in.

He was able to unlaced the family ties that suppressed his growth and he now finds joy in the students who turn their back on the past and yearn for a fulfilling future.

But he did not do it alone. Throughout his journey there were several male figures, one being his college professor Buck Hatch, who steered his development and were models for how he should mentor others.

“I looked up to these older men to teach me what it meant to be a good dad...and I knew that would spur me on to be a good chaplin,” Maggelet said.

As a father of four, Maggelet has spent years growing as a positive male figure through the lives of his children and he uses the same approach to help foster students that come from fatherless, unfortunate circumstances like he did.

“I think I’m most proud when I see those young men that come from really tough backgrounds, no dad in the house, and all those things in our culture that cause for real disfunction like drugs and alcohol like I had in my family...and leave all that behind and go ahead and go forward,” Maggelet said.

As the athletic chaplain, he spends a significant portion of his time working specifically with athletes and has developed an accurate sense on how to disciple them. Maggelet, a former athlete, knows that the extensive training, commitment and sacrifice it takes to be an athlete can carry into the way an athlete approaches their spiritual life, he said.

“Athletes are the kind of people that want convictions as a lifestyle,” Maggelet affirms.

Through conviction athletes can physically extend their limits to achieve success in their sports and during this extension, personal motivation is being developed, he said.

Maggelet expects the same level of conviction to be applied by an athlete who desires to grow in their devotion to the Christian faith.

“He challenges athletes not to be comfortable in their faith walk, but to always grow and to memorize scripture and to see opportunities

where you can really speak boldly about your faith,” Daugherty said.

Doug Geiser, Ashland University Assistant Football Coach, believes athletes carry a responsibility as role models in society due to their admirable dedication and ability on the field.

Subsequently, this opportunity as a role model can be used as a platform to exemplify the Christian faith through an athlete’s participation in college sports.

“You’re ministering to a whole bunch of different people when you play,” Geiser said, “You’re competing and you’re maximizing your potential, but you’re also bearing a witness to those who are watching you, and you never know who that might touch.”

Maggelet said his work largely deals with prepping young men and women to be disciples of God and bring glory to His name through their efforts on and off the field.

However, he also meets with several coaches across the many athletic teams on campus to add to their spiritual development, so that they can minister to their players.

“It’s just exciting to be around the coaches that I get to be around because they want to see their kids be successful,” Maggelet said.

Geiser is one of the several coaches Maggelet convenes with throughout the week, and for over six years they have met on a weekly basis. Geiser credits their meeting to his desire to rekindle the faith that was lit in his childhood, but dimmed over the years.

“You just find after a number of years you kind of drift away y’know?” Geiser said. “You can go to church and do all those things, but I thought I needed something a little bit more to kind of keep me on the straight and narrow, and allow me to grow a little bit.”

Geiser knows first hand the effect Maggelet can have on an individual’s walk in faith, despite having or lacking a background in christianity.

“Having Joe here is facilitating those who already have that relationship, to help them grow in it, and to be available to those who might be interesting and have a little curiosity,” Geiser said.

Maggelet extends his hand to as many as he can, but teaching the Bible is not the only way he demonstrates his devotion to Ashland University.

For those who have not encountered him in a spiritual setting, they are sure to have seen him in the stands or on the sideline during gameday.

Even though he is a self proclaimed Florida State Seminole fan from his adolescent years living in Seminole, Fla., he bleeds purple and gold when the Eagles

are playing.

“It’s funny when people see a – I don’t know how old he is – say 60 year-old man cheering with our student section in the front row being really obnoxious, but he’s wonderful,” Daugherty said.

On several occasions the 5-foot 9-inch Italian chaplain is seen on his feet high-fiving anyone willing to withstand the burn of his enthusiasm and cheering louder than normal vocal cords could handle.

“He means nothing but the best and is really passionate about his student athletes and is always a face in the crowd that I can trust on being there,” Daugherty said.

Though his occupation as a chaplain is the root of his financial stability, Maggelet said he does not

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These activists, thinkers and achievers, as well as the everyday man, are less recognized and discussed in history than those of other nationalities, as most of African American history portrays them in subservient or passive roles, which “in short....is due to systemic racism,” Brown said.

Stuck in a pattern, as Graves describes, the lack of representation of African American history is due to the inability of society to break this standard of focusing on European history and of mainstream media.

According to Brown, this pattern of internalized racism, naturally creating a preference for European history over African American or any other nationalities history, ignores the importance of these other nationalities in forming the United States.

“Given that African Americans were too frequently relegated to service roles in the Jim Crow era, this provides a distorted picture of what African Americans have achieved,” Brown said.

However, movies like “Hidden Figures” and “13th”, as well as other new forms of media, help highlight these stories that have long-gone out of the light, Graves said.

“Everyday our world is becoming more diverse,” Graves said. “People want to see themselves being represented and this demand has caused for an increase in minority representation in the media.”

This representation, both in historical contexts and mainstream media, is important in not only supporting those of minorities but also in helping the greater context of humanity as a whole.

“The more that African Americans are represented in positions of power – whether those are political, corporate, or academic positions, or in the film and publishing industries – the more likely we are to have access to history, film and literature that presents a more thor-

ough picture of our past,” Brown said. Along with those mediums, the Internet has changed how representation is addressed. With the influence of social media, Brown said that more activists are able to call out attention to this absence of representation, leading to more media attention to these stories in history.

While more activists are able to gain more attention through social media and the increasingly-interconnected world, the battle for representation can be supported by everyday people as well. Through actively seeking education and sharing what is learned, the ordinary citizen can advocate for minority representation, Graves said.

Supporting affirmative action and working more toward inclusion are also ways the average person can help to highlight the achievements of African Americans and other minorities, Brown said.

According to Graves, Ashland University’s own Diversity on Campus provides “a platform for minority groups” and information on minority groups, as well as providing a safe space for people to learn more.

On a more global scale, Brown said that Black Lives Matter is a new iteration of the Civil Rights Movement, and that “anyone who sympathizes with the work of Dr. King or Malcolm X should identify with this movement and join the struggle.”

Whether on the global scale, on social media, or here on AU’s campus, learning about African American history is vital in understanding the American journey and the identity of the nation, Brown said.

“People can learn that our education of American history has been for the most part incomplete,” Graves said. “Until we are shown history that portrays the African American, Hispanic American, Native American and others then we cannot say that we fully know what American history is.”