

Altoona-Johnstown bishop eulogizes Paterno as ‘good Catholic,’ friend

ALTOONA, Pa. – Although Joe Paterno will be remembered as “a legend throughout our region and throughout our country,” Bishop Mark L. Bartchak said the iconic football coach will be best remembered in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown as “a good Catholic, a family man and a friend to many.”

Bishop Bartchak made his comments Jan. 22 at a news conference at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona, prior to a prayer service celebrating Respect for Life.

Paterno, 85, died that morning at Mount Nittany Medical Center in State College, just 10 weeks after the Nov. 18 announcement that he was suffering from lung cancer. That announcement came nine days after Paterno’s 61-year career at Penn State University was terminated in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse scandal.

“Faith and family were so important to Joe Paterno,” said Bishop Bartchak. “Joe’s commitment to prayer, family and faith was a great example to the students at Penn State,” and will leave a lasting impact, he said.

Bishop Bartchak expressed his appreciation for the efforts Paterno and his wife, Sue, made to support the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, particularly their leadership in raising funds for the new Catholic campus ministry center now under construction at Penn State. The Paternos served as chair couple for the capital campaign to build the center “and were major contributors themselves,” the bishop noted.

The center, which is set for a spring opening, is being named the Suzanne Pohland Paterno Catholic Student Faith Center in Sue Paterno’s honor.

Bishop Bartchak also noted that Joe and Sue Paterno and their family “were great supporters” of St. Joseph’s Catholic Academy, the diocese’s newest Catholic high school, which opened in Boalsburg last September.

Bishop Bartchak also paid tribute to Sue Paterno, calling her a “self-assured and confident lady, who when she believes in a cause gives herself to that cause 100 percent.”

The bishop asked those mourning Paterno’s death to focus their thoughts “on the loss within his family, and support them.”

Questioned as to how he would advise Paterno’s fans to deal with their grief at his death, Bishop Bartchak said he would do just what he did when he recently met a student at a Catholic school who confided that he had just lost his grandfather.

“A warm hug, a short prayer together and the assurance that things will get better” is how Bishop Bartchak described his response to the grieving youngster.

“That’s what I’d offer to anyone grieving the death of Joe Paterno,” Bishop Bartchak reflected. “I believe Joe himself would view things that way – that with prayer and the assurance of faith, things will get better.”

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