

Anne Arundel faith communities help memorialize six who perished in fire

By Paul McMullen

pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org

Twitter: @ReviewMcMullen

ANNAPOLIS – A Catholic pastor, a neighboring deacon and their faith communities did their best to provide comfort to those left behind after the sudden loss of six lives.

The 950 seats at St. John Neumann Church in Annapolis were filled in the late afternoon of Feb. 12, for a memorial service for Don Pyle, his wife, Sandra, and four of their grandchildren, sisters Alexis and Kaitlyn Boone, and their cousins, Charlotte and Wes Boone.

All perished early Jan. 19, when a fire burned the grandparents' 16,000-foot waterfront mansion south of Annapolis to the ground.

Alexis, 8, and Kaitlyn, 7, were the daughters of Randy and Stacey Boone, parishioners of Holy Family in Davidsonville, where the girls attended religious education.

Holy Family has less than half the seating capacity of St. John Neumann, a mission of St. Mary, Annapolis, where Randy and Stacey Boone were married, according to Deacon Leroy Moore, the director of liturgy for those communities.

Deacon Moore helped open the doors of St. John Neumann. Father Andy Aaron, the pastor of Holy Family, visited Alexis' and Kaitlyn's parents Jan. 25, as soon as he could return from a previously scheduled out-of-state trip to see his mother.

Both spoke at the Feb. 12 memorial service, titled "The Pyle-Boone Celebration of Love," as the setting sun streamed in through the stained glass on the west wall of the church and classmates and friends of the Boone cousins climbed onto their mother's laps.



Deacon Leroy S. Moore of St. Mary, Annapolis, and Father Andy Aaron, pastor of Holy Family, Davidsonville, both spoke at a Feb. 12 memorial service for Don and Sandra Pyle and their grandchildren: Alexis Boone, 8; Kaitlyn Boone, 7; Wesley Boone, 6 and Charlotte Boone, 8. (Karen Osborne | CR Staff)

During the opening prayer, Father Aaron encouraged everyone gathered, regardless of their faith background, to “remember to pray.”

“If you’ve never done it before, this is the time to fold your hands and pray,” Father Aaron said. “I know this is a terribly difficult day, but if we’re there for each other, we’re going to get through this. We’re going to storm heaven. We’re going to pray.”

Don Pyle was 56, and his wife was 63. Deacon Moore spoke to the paradox of young children dying alongside those who had lived full lives.

“It is most difficult to associate children with the coffin,” he said. “One represents the beginning of life, and the other represents the end.”

In overcoming grief and tears, Deacon Moore spoke of enthusiasm and “faith, faith in God.”

In between words from the two churchmen were remembrances of the six deceased. The children were remembered by Cathy North, one of their teachers in Severn School’s lower school.

She remembered Kaitlyn “caring about her friends” and “being the first one to offer help if needed.”

“She had the gift of making everyone feel included,” North said.

Alexis, she said, “loved animals and to draw them.”

“Lexi and Katie had a heartfelt bond as sisters,” North said. “We shared their joy at them being big sisters to their baby brother (who was weeks old at their death). Katie would say, ‘Lexi is the big sister, I’m the baby sister, and he’s the baby brother.’”

The four Boone cousins had spent Jan. 18 with their grandparents, followed by a sleepover at the Pyle home. According to fire officials, the fatal blaze was likely sparked by a faulty electrical outlet, and fueled by a Christmas tree.

Randy Boone, and his brother, Clint, the father of Charlotte and Wesley, are the sons of Sandra Pyle and stepsons of Don Pyle.

The Pyle and Boone families requested that no photos be taken during the Feb. 12 memorial service, and the funeral Mass Feb. 16 is private.

“We’re just trying to be as accommodating as possible,” Deacon Moore said beforehand.

Also see:

Mother Mary Lange Award recipients ‘honored’ to be chosen

Wedding’s backstory is a winding path

Looking back: Playground to honor St. Margaret student