

Beloved youth minister remembered at O'Dwyer Retreat House

SPARKS - As Beth Rausch joined other music ministers in singing "Welcome Home," friends and family gathered Oct. 20 at the Monsignor O'Dwyer Retreat House to honor Rausch's father, Mark Pacione, in a special way.

Pacione, a much-loved youth minister and former director of the archdiocesan division of youth and young adult ministry, **died suddenly in 2014** following a 40-year career that included helping organize the 1995 visit of St. John Paul II to Baltimore.

During a Mass, Father Michael Triplett, pastor of Our Lady of Grace in Parkton, blessed a specially designed wood and canvas processional cross crafted in Pacione's memory.

As the fall colors glistened through the windows of the retreat house's St. Joseph Hall, Carol Pacione, Mark Pacione's widow, began the veneration of the newly blessed cross. Her genuflection was humble and deliberate. The former pastoral life director of St. Pius X in Rodgers Forge gazed upon the image of the crucified Christ, then venerated the icon.

Some 60 guests followed her lead until Rausch, her husband Ian, and their two-year-old son Eliott, completed the moment.

Carol Pacione told the Catholic Review that as she approached the cross, she felt overwhelmed two and a half years after her husband's death because people continue to gather because of him.

"That cross just culminated that for me today," she said, tears in her eyes. "They (the people attending the Mass) reflect who Mark was, and Mark reflected who they are."

The processional cross was used officially for the first time as those gathered took a short walk from the hall where Mass was celebrated to the chapel just around the corner.

Once there, a wooden cross vessel waited to host its partner. Dimensional letters on the wall next to the cross read, "People of the Cross. We walk in Hope" - the words everyone chanted during the procession.

Pacione was the best man at Pat and Lee Ann Sprankle's wedding, and was godfather to their son Matt.

"The cross we now bear as we walk is one of loss at his passing," said Pat Sprankle during a gathering after the liturgy. "It remains a cross of hope and love because Mark's death is not the end, but a redirecting."

Sprankle shared a quote from Pope Francis at World Youth Day in 2013: "What has the cross left in each one of us? It gives us a treasure that no one else can give. It's a love which enters in death to concur it."

Local artist Stephen St. Amant, who said it took hundreds of hours to make the one-of-kind cross, has known the Pacione family for many years.

"His presence is felt through the many people you saw here," St. Amant said. "He enriched so many lives. For me as an artist, this is just another one of the things that Mark has inspired me to do."

Michael Downes, who was appointed director of the O'Dwyer campus in 2011, said Pacione was one of the most caring, enthusiastic, faithful people he has ever met.

"When you were with Mark, you felt like you were the only person in the world," he said.

The Mark. D Pacione Foundation, which supports archdiocesan youth initiatives, will host a bull and oyster roast fundraiser at St. Mary Magdalen Mission in Bel Air Nov. 4. For more information, visit www.pacionefoundation.com.

