

Funeral for surgeon killed in Iraq fills Philadelphia cathedral

PHILADELPHIA - The Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul was filled Jan. 5 for the funeral Mass of Dr. John P. Pryor, 42, a U.S. Army Reserve major and the trauma program director for the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Pryor was in his second tour of duty as a trauma surgeon near Mosul, Iraq, when he was killed by a mortar round on Christmas Day. He is survived by his wife, Dr. Carmela Calvo, and their three young children: Danielle, Francis Xavier and John Jr.

He was born in New York and resided in Moorestown, N.J.; his funeral was held in the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia because of the great number of extended family, friends, uniformed members of the military and medical colleagues who wished to attend.

Father Damian McElroy, pastor of Dr. Pryor's home parish, Our Lady of Good Counsel in Moorestown, and the principal celebrant of the funeral Mass, spoke eloquently of Dr. Pryor's spirit of sacrifice. He told how, after the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001, he dropped everything and rushed to New York and ground zero where he worked through the night assisting the injured.

He said Dr. Pryor joined the Army Reserve four years ago because he knew the surgical skills honed by treating victims of violence in Philadelphia were needed there.

Dr. Pryor's first tour of duty in Iraq was two year ago, and against the wishes of family and friends, he accepted a second tour beginning in December. He knew he was putting himself in harm's way and apologized to them in writing for doing what

he believed he must do.

“He felt very strongly about his duty to serve, especially in wartime,” Father McElroy said.

“John loved his family, he loved his children, he lived and breathed for them,” the priest added. “He felt saving lives justified the sacrifice. He loved his life here, he served humanity generously and he served God generously.”

Dr. Pryor will also be missed at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. A statement issued by the hospital at his death spoke of the surgeon’s passion for service and giving back.

It said Dr. Pryor “was a magical man, with boundless energy and goodness. He was a devoted son, husband, father, colleague and friend. He was an outstanding physician, gifted surgeon, teacher and mentor.”

Concelebrating Pryor’s funeral Mass were Father James O’Neill, parochial vicar at Our Lady of Good Counsel; Redemptorist Father Francis Gargani, a cousin; and Father Joseph DiGregorio, a former Army chaplain.

Pryor was buried with full military honors at Colestown Cemetery in Cherry Hill, N.J., with Lt. Gen. Eric Schoomaker, surgeon general of the Army, presiding.