
LAKE SIDE CHURCH of Chicago

†transforming lives †transforming our world for Christ

The **LAMPLIGHTER**



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GOOD FOR EVIL

“We saw people that were obviously suffering. They felt a great sense of responsibility for what happened. How could we add to their pain displays of anger or anything like that?” *Barry Sullivan, father of Declan Sullivan who was killed in a tragic accident at Notre Dame*

Did poor judgment lead to the accident? Yes. Were best safety practices followed? No. Did bad decisions contribute to Declan’s death? Yes. Did the Sullivan family decide to sue the university for negligence? No.

In a society where litigation lawyers use marketing like politicians and courts award multi-million-dollar claims like trophies in a youth soccer league, the Sullivans bypassed the legal system. “We never really felt a reason to pursue any kind of legal action,” Sullivan said in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* last week.

“It was not our first impulse to go out and hire a lawyer. That’s not the way we’re wired. ... We didn’t want to take resources and energy away from other positive things that might happen by tying up people with lawsuits and other actions.”

The Sullivans contented themselves with Notre Dame’s internal investigation, which concluded that “no one acted in disregard for safety.” Instead, “a sudden and extraordinary” wind and inadequate policies contributed to Declan’s death.

Notre Dame’s football program employed the 20-year-old student as a videographer. On the October day Declan was scheduled to film a football practice last year, he wrote on Twitter, “Gusts of wind up to 60 mph today will be fun at work ... I guess I’ve lived long enough.”

The football program’s policy prohibited videographers from using the hydraulic lift when winds reached more than 35 mph. The data available to the staff that day did not indicate that winds had exceeded that level. Computer forensics determined that no one had clicked on the wind advisory icon that warned of possible gusts up to 50 mph.

Once on the lift, Declan tweeted, “This is terrifying.” Declan had a propensity for the dramatic, according to his father. But he was not shy and if he really had feared for his safety, he would have taken himself off the lift. He chose to remain on the lift and a severe gust of wind toppled it while scissored 50 feet above the ground. He died soon after reaching the hospital.

The accident prompted Notre Dame and the Indiana Department of Labor to launch the UpRight Campaign. Providing resources to those who use aerial lifts for filming and directing, the campaign urges access to real-time weather information.

The Declan Drumm Sullivan Memorial Fund has received more than \$100,000 in donations. The Sullivans directed the fund to Horizons for Youth, a Chicago charity that provides tutoring, mentoring, college preparation courses and need-based scholarships for disadvantaged students. Notre Dame also established a scholarship in Sullivan’s name.

The Sullivan family provides a different wind of fresh air in a greedy and vengeful culture. They have chosen to interpret the tragedy with grace and mercy, reflecting values of a kingdom that transcends this world. Instead of blame, they offered humble understanding. Accidents happen. Sometimes they result from human error. Sometimes not. Imperfect humans make mistakes. I do not know any perfect ones.

Paul commanded, “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15) The Sullivans did not try to trace the evil accident back to evil actions. They chose to do good instead. Out of their pain came grace rather than anger.

Paul’s instructions blossom out of Jesus’ teaching and life. Jesus’ standard baffled the religious experts of his day. “Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” Matthew 5:39-41

Jesus not only preached these principles of a higher kingdom, he lived them. When he was beaten and crucified, he never lifted a finger in retaliation. He had the power to direct legions of angels in his defense (Matthew 26:53), but he willingly suffered a severe injustice at the hands of evil men because he knew that a higher Authority rules over all the affairs of men and he executes justice in his time and his way.

The Sullivans have modeled what this looks like in modern culture. May their tribe multiply.

Pastor Stan