

Matt, Donna, Andy; Dave and Angel, on behalf of our whole Church Family, indeed, the whole Octorara Community, I offer you our deepest sympathy and profound love.

Throughout this past week, the one question repeated again and again to me—sometimes in tears and sometimes in anger—is “Why”. Of course, there is no satisfactory answer to the question and I have found myself feeling as helpless as everyone else in the face of such tragedy.

I have prayed constantly, asking God to give me the Word of Comfort that He wants to speak to you, as well as to all you young people, friends of Carly and Daulton, bearing such unbearable pain and sorrow. My heart is breaking for you too. You shouldn't have to suffer so much at a time when your lives should be full of joy.

It occurred to me to seek God's answer in the Scriptures chosen by Carly's family for today's celebration. The Sacred Writer tells us that there is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. He then sums this up by saying, “God has made everything appropriate to its time...”. But none of us can believe that 16 is an appropriate time to die, especially a 16 year old as beautiful, compassionate, caring, and loving as Carly. No! No! No! There is nothing appropriate about that.

In His sermon on the mount Jesus tells us that the sorrowing, those in mourning, will be blessed with comfort. But today there is little sense of comfort for those who want to bask just one more time in the warmth of Carly's beautiful smile.

But, there! As I pray over our second reading from I Corinthians, in the verses that hung on a plaque in Carly's room, “Love is patient; love is

kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth,” I begin to sense a glimmer of an answer to the question haunting all of us, “Why?”

Carly was all about love. She embodied love. Her smile! Her joy! Her exuberance! They all shouted love. She loved her family, her friends, her animals. Carly loved the beauty of the natural world around her and the expanse and roar of the sea. In a sense, couldn't we say that Carly was love?

But, wait a minute! Doesn't St. John tell us in the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter of his first Letter, “God is love, and he (and she) who abides in love, abides in God and God in him (and her)”?

If you read the Bible carefully, it seems to me that the most important thing God wants us to know is how much He loves all His creation, most especially those He created in His own image and likeness. He sent Judges and Kings and Prophets and, finally, His own Son to show us how much He loves us. Again, St. John tells us, “...for God is love. God's love was revealed in our midst in this way: He sent His only Son to the world that we might have life through Him.

Still, God wasn't convinced that we knew how much He loved us. Apparently, the best way, the only way, He could find to finally convince us of His love for us was to die for us in the person of His only Son. It was only when that Son rose from the dead that we began to see

the width, the length, the depth, and the breadth of God's love for us. He showed us in His own Flesh and Blood that God never dies! Love never dies! And His love for us is eternal.

His only command in our acceptance of that love is that we love one another as He has loved us. That's where God is to be found. In our love for one another, we show God that we love Him too. That's where God abides—in our love for one another.

In the extended Imbierowicz/Streett Family, I am sure there were always genuine expressions of love between you. Yet, in this tragic circumstance of Carly's death, all restraints, all barriers, all differences that inhibited the expression of love melted away.

Likewise, we all live here because we find it a good place to be with people we genuinely like. However, with the deaths of Carly and Daulton, love overcame every difference between us, young and old alike, and an outpouring of love and generosity toward these families who suffered such unbearable loss overflowed beyond our imagining.

If we dare to open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, our hearts to understand that this love, that was always there, can now be recognized for what it is—God dwelling in our midst.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that God caused Carly's death any more than I am saying that God caused the death of His Son, Jesus. Rather, I am suggesting that just as Jesus' death caused humanity to look beyond its' own selfishness to recognize in His act of

sacrificial Love the face of God; so Carly's death has enabled us to see the face of God in our love for one another.

Right now! Here, in this place, brought together by the beautiful, vivacious, exuberant life of Carly Marie Imbierowicz and her tragic, untimely, even mysterious death, we abide in love and God abides in us. If we dare to open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to understand toward the one beside us or in front of us or behind us, we will see the face of God.

The challenge we face as we move forward from this place is to make sure that Carly's life and death, like that of Jesus, was not in vain. That challenge is met every time we dare to love beyond all our fears; every time we dare to love beyond all our weaknesses; every time we dare to love beyond all our hurts and disappointments.

As God gave it, Paul proclaimed it, and Carly lived it, remember, "Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not jealous. It does not put on airs. It is not snobbish. Love is never rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure." "Love never fails"! "Love never dies"!