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Lessons From Larry

04.19.2013 | Students

When asked what they loved most about Larry Cook, his friends point to his competitive nature, can-do attitude, charm and persuasive ways.

And they all mentioned his smile.

"Larry, for us, was his smile," recounted Brother Tom Pieper, S.M., campus minister in Stuart Hall, at an April 18 memorial service in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception on campus.

Cook, a first-year mechanical engineering student from Cincinnati, died April 2. His loss has left a hole that will never close in the hearts of his family and a campus community who embraced him. About 160 family and friends gathered to celebrate his life at the campus memorial service. A prayer service just hours after he died attracted a standing-room-only crowd.

"We're more like a family here on campus. Larry was a big part of our family," remembered Laura Bistrek, director of the Minority Engineering Program. "It was always a joy seeing Larry walk through the halls of OMA (Office of Multicultural Student Affairs), wearing his trademark headphones," added Patty Alvarez, director of OMA.

On campus, Cook's classmates are grappling with his death most deeply.

"If you look at the night sky, you'll see stars," said Pieper, reading the reflections of Cook's friends. "Larry, he wasn't a star, he was the moon. Maybe it was that he always had something to say, regardless of how ridiculous it was. Maybe it was that big smile he carried with him 24/7. Maybe it was his optimistic outlook on life. Maybe it was the charm, the passion and positive energy he brought to any group. ...Larry, we loved you like a brother."

Another friend told Pieper, "I know it sounds cheesy, but I believe that Larry truly had powers within that smile. ... He was always reminding me that the world is beautiful and that God would never let us down. He gave me hope when I was in a dark place, happiness when I was sad, and love in friendship when I was alone."

As Pieper spoke, Cook's classmates wept quietly. Interspersed with prayers, stories and moving music by the Ebony Heritage Singers and the Praise Team, this was a service "filled with grace," said Crystal Sullivan, director of Campus Ministry.

The Rev. Dr. LaKendra Hardware, an ordained Baptist minister who serves as campus minister for Interdenominational Ministry on campus, offered words of "hope, comfort, peace and promise" as she thanked the family.

"The University of Dayton community has been blessed immensely by the life of your loved one," she said. "May you continue to know the depth of love Larry had for this University is felt many times over for him as we remember — individually and collectively — our stories of Larry."

Earlier, she summed up the mood in the chapel: "Look around — see the faces, the smiles, the tears, the pain, the questions, the memories encased in conflicted expressions.

"These are the lives," she said, "impacted in ways untold by one young man's life."

Although the Montgomery County Coroner's Office made an initial determination that the death was a suicide, the death continues to be investigated. The Dayton Police Department is the primary investigative agency, and the University of Dayton is assisting in that investigation. The family has shared their intent to investigate the circumstances of the death, and the University shares their desire to find answers.