

I'd like to extend my condolences to you, Diane, and to all Charlie's family on behalf of my family and all your friends.

It is hard to lose a family member, especially when that person could have had many more years ahead. It is unbearable to experience such a tragic death. In a way these last few months have been a sad metaphor for Charlie's life. People didn't know where he was. People loved him, but they could not always reach him.

We must not let these events overshadow the accomplishments of Charlie's life as an athlete, a employee, a son and a husband. The sadness we feel at Charlie's death comes because of the joy he gave us in life.

As Christians we believe that God made Charlie, loved him, and continues to love him through the end. No one loved Charlie more than God did, and we entrust Charlie completely now to God's care.

There are a couple of dangers we all need to watch out for. One looks back; the other looks forward. We will be tempted to look back and wonder, "Was there more I could have done? Could I have reached out to Charlie in a better way? Could I have helped him look to a brighter future?" Maybe. We all can do a better job helping one another through times of distress. But could we have stopped Charlie from taking his final actions? Not necessarily. God gave each of us freedom to choose. We can influence one another, but each person makes his or her own choices. Each of us is responsible for what we choose.

The other danger is to look forward and worry about Charlie's eternal salvation. That is in God's hands now, and it couldn't be anywhere better. There is a place in the gospels where Jesus suggests that some sins may be forgiven not in this life, but in the life to come. It's a provocative statement that gives us hope that somehow, in ways God alone understands, forgiveness and salvation are offered to those who have felt lost and alone. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance."

We gather today in gratitude for Charlie's life and in confidence of God's love. Let us pray that the Good Shepherd, who laid down his own life for the sheep, will take this lamb upon his shoulders and carry him safely home.