

Fallen firefighter remembered at Ashland Mass

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ASHLAND - Parishioners packed a Catholic church in this Southern Oregon town today to quietly honor David Steele, a 19-year-old who was one of seven firefighters killed Tuesday in a helicopter crash in Northern California.

The Steele family, which attended the service, long has been active in Our Lady Of the Mountain Catholic Church, where David Steele was involved in youth programs and outreach ministries.

"The whole family is always here on Sundays," the Rev. Sean Weeks said. "And being a small town, all of the youth, they all grew up together, went to Ashland High School. So, everyone knows each other."

Weeks led an hourlong service that largely spoke to everyday living, but was sprinkled with references to Steele and his unexpected and sudden passing.

"I began this Mass just speaking to the fact that we gather this particular Sunday with our community's heart broken," he said afterward, "but that we also came to be fed and be strengthened by God's love and His word."

His said his message for the congregation was that God's "going to get us through this."

"We want to make sure everything is so secure and comfortable," Weeks said during the sermon. But "this life is filled with things that can distract us. Evil ... earthquakes, fires."

Tuesday's crash near Redding, Calif., claimed the lives of nine people and injured four. Of the nine dead, seven were firefighters, one was the helicopter's command pilot and one was a Forest Service employee.

Of the injured, three were firefighters and one was the co-pilot.

All were fighting a portion of the 94,000-acre Iron-Alps Complex fire in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. And all of the men in the crash were referred to in a prayer during the Mass by a church parishioner.

"For the repose of the souls of David Steele and Edrik Gomez and all ... who gave their lives in service as firefighters last Tuesday, will they rise up in glory in our heavenly kingdom. May we pray to the lord," he said.

"Lord, hear our prayer," the congregation answered.

"For the comfort of families who lost their sons ... we pray to the lord," he said.

"Lord, hear our prayer," the congregation answered.

Speaking personally about Steele, Weeks said he appreciated the young man's balance of his sports -- he played football for the Grizzlies and loved rugby -- and everyday persona.

"He was just a humble, quiet" guy, he said.

"It's just good to have him here. And he's here every Sunday when he's in town. And he's just always smiling. He's just a real gentle spirit."

[Read profiles of those who were involved in the crash.](#)

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