

Humboldt pastor guides crash victims' families on the long road to forgiveness

There were tears, there was pain and there was forgiveness as 30-year-old truck driver Jaskirat Singh Sidhu faced the families of the people killed and maimed in the Humboldt Broncos' bus crash.

Sidhu listened and wept for three days as victim impact statements were read in court last week after he pled guilty to 29 counts of dangerous driving in the April 6 crash near Tisdale, Sask. that killed 16 and injured 13 others.

Two of the victims, Logan Hunter and Stephen Wack, were local Alberta alumni of St. Albert Catholic High School. They were mourned at a small memorial in April of last year.

The question of forgiveness isn't a public discussion at Humboldt's Catholic parish of St. Augustine's, said pastor Rev. Joseph Salihu.



Rev. Joseph Salihu

"As with every public tragedy, eventually it dwindles down to the immediate family," Father Salihu said.

"Then they have to deal with these issues. Their responses, of course, vary."

The media spotlight on Humboldt, a town of less than 6,000 about an hour's

drive east of Saskatoon, has delayed and drawn out the grieving process for many of the families, Salihu said.

“A lot of the families are tired of all the publicity around this. They’ve become very, very private now,” he said.

“You have two realities here. You have the public reality and then you’ve got the private reality for immediate families. Making a blanket statement (about forgiveness) is a bit dangerous. Families grieve differently.”

Many of those who spoke of forgiveness during the sentencing hearing also spoke of their Christian faith, or of their desire for faith.

“I want to tell you that I forgive you,” said Christina George-Haugan in her statement.



Her husband Darcy was the Broncos’ head coach.

She told the court she was full of anger as she began to compose her statement, but she remembered her husband’s Christian faith.

“There are days when the unjustness and sadness are definitely there, but I have been forgiven for things when I didn’t deserve it, so I will do the same,” she told Sidhu.

Pain and forgiveness are a tough combination and not everyone was ready to forgive.

“You hurt my baby. You broke him, and for this I will never forgive you,” said Andrea Joseph, the mother of 20-year-old crash victim Jaxon Joseph.

Sidhu, who came to Canada in 2013, apologized to the families.

"I can't even imagine what you are going through, what you have been through. I've taken the most valuable things of your life," Sidhu told the families. "I am so, so, so, so, so sorry about this pain."

For Melissa Doerksen, daughter of Glen Doerksen, the 59-year-old bus driver killed in the crash, forgiveness is a work in progress.

"We're working towards finding understanding and forgiveness, because that's what my dad would have wanted," she said.

"Forgiveness is one of the highest qualities you can achieve as a human being on earth," Scott Thomas, whose 18-year-old son Evan was killed, told reporters outside the courtroom.

"I wouldn't consider myself a religious man, but I do consider myself a spiritual being and one of the things we're trying to reconcile here is my existence on this earth and my ability to find my son in another realm when this is over."

The job of every pastor and every Christian community is to meet people where they are in the grieving process.

"The families directly involved are dealing with very complex grieving issues," Salihi said.