

[News](#)

The memorial for journalist James Foley outside St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Alton,

The memorial for journalist James Foley outside St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Alton, New Hampshire. (Photo courtesy of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church



by Aleja Hertzler-McCain

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 18, 2022

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Alton, New Hampshire, celebrated a Mass and dedicated a memorial on Oct. 9 in honor of the late parishioner James Foley, a freelance journalist who was killed in Syria in 2014 by fighters with the so-called Islamic State.

The memorial, a granite slab, has an image of Foley and an inscription that calls him an "International Conflict Journalist, Son, Brother, Parishioner who aspired to be a man of moral courage." In the image, Foley is going about his work as a journalist, wearing a bulletproof vest and carrying a camera.

Fr. Robert Cole, [the church's pastor](#), told NCR that he and the parish wanted to have a memorial where Foley "is in action and is alive as he is now alive in Christ, risen in Christ."

Diane Foley, James' mother, said in an interview that James was dedicated to "telling stories of people suffering, in those cases, amid conflict" and showing "the effect of the war on the people, children, families."

"Micah 6:8" is written on the bottom right of the memorial slab, [a reference to the verse](#): "You have been told ... what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."

The memorial for journalist James Foley outside Saint Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Alton

The memorial for journalist James Foley outside Saint Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Alton, New Hampshire. (Photo courtesy of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church)

Diane Foley said she had cross-stitched the verse for James before he left for college at Marquette University, in Milwaukee. Marquette "was a gift to Jim. It further nourished a lot of his seeds of faith that grew here in Wolfeboro," she said.

Diane Foley said that the memorial's emphasis on moral courage came from a lecture James gave at Marquette after enduring a 44-day imprisonment in Libya in 2011.

James Foley had [said](#), "For some reason I have physical courage but really if you think about it, that is nothing compared to moral courage. I can go and get those shots but if I do not have the moral courage to challenge authority, to write about things that may have reprisals on my career, we do not have journalism."

Diane Foley said she hoped young people who saw the memorial would be inspired by her son's witness. "Our son challenges me as his mother to do my best to live with moral courage," she said.

James Foley grew up participating in faith formation and as an altar server at St. Cecelia's Parish in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire. St. Cecelia's merged with St. Joan of Arc Parish in Alton to become St. Katharine Drexel in 2003.

Foley began his career as a teacher for the Teach for America program, but later worked on development projects in Iraq in the years following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of that country, before going on to become a freelance journalist focusing on the Middle East.

Foley traveled and reported from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. He was captured in northwestern Syria in 2012 and was beheaded on video in 2014.

James Foley told the Marquette community [in an article](#) that his faith had sustained him while he was being held in Libya. He wrote about praying the rosary, like his mother and grandmother. "Prayer was the glue that enabled my freedom, an inner freedom first and later the miracle of being released during a war in which the regime had no real incentive to free us," he wrote.

Advertisement

After James' death, Diane Foley said she has also found solace in her faith. "I think the Lord reveals his face in the midst of deep suffering," she said.

"Sometimes when the worst things happen, that's where good people show up," she said, expressing gratitude for the "buckets of mail" the family received after James died and the support they received from their diocese.

Pope Francis also [called](#) Diane and her husband after James died to express his condolences.

Cole, the pastor, remarked on the family's response, "When something as tragic as this happens, you can go two ways, right? You can curse God, you can abandon faith in the church, or you can enter into the mystery, and they have," he said.

He cited the family's work through the [James W. Foley Legacy Foundation](#) as an example of continuing James' work. The foundation, which focuses on supporting American hostages and safety initiatives for journalists, recently celebrated [the release of seven American prisoners from Venezuela and one from Iran](#). "That was a huge blessing," Diane Foley said.

Deacon Charlie Ferraro said that, while teaching a class on the Beatitudes in another parish in Florida, parishioners had talked about James Foley as an example of a peacemaker. "He's having a profound effect beyond just this parish," said Ferraro.

Cole says the memorial is already drawing people to visit St. Katharine Drexel. "It's good for us to thank God for James Foley," he said.

"He could have been given to any other parish, and he was given to us. He's ours," said Cole.