

'He was a very, very good man'

Officer Chris Jones was remembered as a person whose "love touched so many people."

By **BEN FINLEY**
STAFF WRITER

PHILADELPHIA — For several minutes, the only thing that moved was their breath.

Hundreds of law enforcement officials — their ranks deep and wide — stood in strict formation, frozen in a long salute to fallen Middletown police Officer Chris Jones.

Their brows faced Jones' casket as the bagpipes played outside the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia. And the other mourners, including Jones' family and friends, a U.S. congressman, Bucks County officials from the district attorney to a county commissioner, stood still, too, their hands on their hearts, except when they had to wipe a tear.

The scene on Thursday of a police officer's funeral Mass at the cathedral was all too familiar. But the main participants were not.

Jones is the first Middletown cop to die in the line of duty in the force's history, the 11th on record in Bucks County.

But neither the number nor the town mattered. Police from all over the region came to pay their respects.

Besides the throngs of Bucks County officers, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey, U.S. immigrations officers, customs officers, state troopers and university cops were there.

Jason Mancuso, a Bristol Township police officer in Bucks County's honor guard, put it this way: "What it comes down to is, a police officer is a police officer. It doesn't matter what the patch on their sleeve says."

Two seemingly endless lines of cops led to Jones' casket in the cathedral. A sea of blue uniforms stretched past the countless pews of the cavernous basilica and out the front doors into the cold. Officers just kept arriving, and when they reached Jones, they saluted or made the sign of the cross.

Long before Cardinal Justin Rigali gave his homily, the pews, folding chairs and back aisles brimmed with mourners.

Rigali said: "In the hours immediately after the death of police Officer Christopher C. Jones, among the first reactions of his tragic demise was a statement of his own pastor, which included these simple but deeply meaningful words: 'He was a very, very good man.'

"We are grateful that this love touched so many people," the cardinal said.

Outside the packed cathedral, that sentiment played on a large television screen, which displayed photos of Jones throughout his life.

A shot of Jones in high school with shoulder-length hair faded into a young man in a U.S. Navy uniform, which was replaced by a photo of Jones in the Middletown uniform he would wear for 10 years. The photos showed an always youthful looking Jones holding a newborn child, sitting near a birthday cake or toasting champagne with his wife on their wedding day. His arm was almost always around someone — his wife, one of their three kids, a buddy.

Parked right outside the cathedral was a Middletown patrol car, on which Jones' name was painted. The rear window was adorned with two images of the 37-year-old.

Some police officers touched the patrol car before walking inside.

Jones was killed last week during a routine traffic stop on the Route 1 Superhighway. He was next to his car when a Toyota slammed into it and pushed the cruiser on top of him.

"I heard them saying it came over as a routine traffic stop," said one mourner, Harry Barnes, an Amtrak police officer from Morrisville.

"But no matter how minor the infraction, there's no such thing. And this just proves it. It's just a shame."

Another mourner, Ron Starkman, a paramedic for the Tri-Hampton Rescue Squad, said: "I didn't know him. But I just said to myself I had to come."

Jack Bonner, supervisor for the James J. Dougherty Funeral Home, said he's never seen a memorial like this one in his 25 years working in Bucks.

"I do this every day, but I've never quite had this decorum, these ceremonial aspects," he said. "It's just amazing. I'm honored."

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Surrounded by her children Julianne, Brendan and Christopher, Suzanne Jones leaves her husband's funeral Mass. KIM WEIMER / **STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**





Officers line up outside the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia to attend a funeral Mass for Middletown police Officer Chris Jones. A slide show depicting the life of Jones was shown outside the church. KIM WEIMER / **STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**