Officer Joseph Parise passed away in the line of duty on Sept. 24, 2018 at Regions Hospital in St. Paul after responding to an inmate assaulting an officer at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Oak Park Heights. Parise, a four-year veteran of the Minnesota Department of Corrections, had a medical emergency after running across the prison complex to help his fellow officers.

“Every account I have heard, I can honestly say Joe gave up his life as a hero; he was doing what he loved to do and that was helping others,” said funeral officiant and MCF-Stillwater Chaplain, Rev. Martin Shanahan. “On Sept. 24, Joe did it again,” Shanahan said. “He ran directly into the conflict to help his comrades. He made sure everyone was safe and he returned to his post, and only then did he succumb to the stress of the event and offer up his life.”
Joe never hesitated to put himself in harm’s way.

- Former OPH Officer James Carter
He loved the look, he loved the march, everything the Honor Guard stood for, he loved.

- OPH Officer Scott Roemer
In memory of Corrections Officer II Joseph M. Parise, former Oak Park Heights Prison Honor Guard member.

Oak Park Heights Prison Honor Guard conducted a ceremonial folding of this flag in the prison lobby on Sept 26. The nameplate and serving since tag are from Joe’s Honor Guard uniform. The coin and patch are in memory of Joe’s dedicated service to the MN Department of Corrections and the Honor Guard.


A memorial display in the parking lot at MCF-Oak Park Heights
“He was honestly one-of-a-kind, and I feel honored and privileged to have even known him.”

- Officer Robert Harder
October 3, the day after Joe’s funeral, former MCF-OPH chaplain, Lynda Lee, opened the OPH chapel for 2nd and 3rd Watch staff to be able to stop by to grieve, and write notes for a Remembrance Wreath that was created in Joe’s honor. Those who were unable to visit the chapel wrote messages at the front during shift change. The memories written on the gold paper tags were woven into grapevine that held thistle flowers (pain of loss), rosemary sprigs (joy) and eucalyptus (healing breath). Lynda delivered the wreath to the family the following week.

Making meaning with tangible objects is important during times of grief, so in the chapel, Lynda created a visual meditation for those who came that day to write their memories of Joe. With Sinatra singing in the background (Joe loved his music), there were several symbols on the table where friends wrote memories of Joe. There were four tea lights (years of service), bowls with chocolate (the richness in human connection), paper (the body is a house for the soul and spirit), lights inside a flower vase (what is within, lives on), blue flowers (the uniform and mission), and nuts (Joe’s sense of humor).
I am a huge sports fan. So, when Joe first started here several people told me that he was Zach Parise’s cousin. For those who don’t know, Zach Parise is a player for the Minnesota Wild. I didn’t know then, and actually still don’t know whether or not they genuinely thought this or were just messing with me. For that reason it took me at least a couple months to get up the courage to ask Joe about it. Finally, one day we ended up in the elevator together and I figured, what the heck, so I asked him if he really was Zach Parise’s cousin. Joe gave me that sideways grin he had, laughed, and said “that would be nice, but no I’m not.” I was kind of embarrassed, so I explained that I had been told this by several other people, and being a huge sports fan, I had to ask. Again, he smiled and laughed, and said not to worry, it wasn’t the first time being asked that. We exited the elevator and I walked away a little disappointed that I hadn’t just met Zach Parise’s cousin. But little did I know that I had just met someone much more important... a hero.

By DeeAnn Sommers, RN, MCF-OPH
He was a hero. He was doing what he loved to do. He was helping others. Joe changed the world. He changed it by caring for other people.

- Rev. Marty Shanahan
Special Thanks

Thank you to all the law enforcement agencies, fire departments, emergency service organizations, and other public service agencies that attended and helped with the funeral, along with other corrections agency honor guards who came from around the country. We also thank everyone who came out to honor Joe, and to all the people who sent cards of condolences, donations, and flowers.