

Church treats family touched by Ebola as people, not just patients

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People affected by the Ebola virus are not just potential carriers to be shunned and feared but individuals with dignity and worth, created in the image of God, worshippers at [Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas](#) heard in a Sunday morning sermon.

An outbreak of the often-fatal illness spreading in West Africa since March now carries a name and a face for the congregation, since a church member is quarantined after contact with the first person to die of Ebola in the United States.



Thomas Eric Duncan, shown at a wedding in Ghana in 2001, died from Ebola at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas, Oct. 8. (Wikipedia Image) Britt Carlson—an intern in Wilshire’s pastoral residency program that prepares young preachers through supervised ministry experience—[said in her sermon](#) anyone reading a newspaper or watching television news knows a lot of people are in a panic because Ebola arrived in Dallas.

“What we’ve been trying to do as a church this week in light of the news about Eric Duncan and Louise Troh is to stop people from treating them like they aren’t people with stories,” Carlson said.

Thomas Eric Duncan, who died from Ebola at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Oct. 8, moved to Dallas from Liberia about a week before he got sick. Troh, who had a child with Duncan in Liberia before coming to the United States 16 years ago, remains in quarantine but has shown no symptoms.

George Mason, senior pastor at Wilshire Baptist Church, said the couple recently decided to marry and were planning to talk to him about performing their wedding before Ebola struck.

Mason described experiences of recent days as “a terrible privilege.”

‘She’s one of us’

“It’s certainly a terrible thing that’s happened, and we are mortified by it like everyone else, and we’re prayerful,” Mason [said in an interview](#) on CNN. “But at the same time, she’s one of us.

“She’s part of our church. She is a full-fledged member. We love and care for her, and this is what we do as a church. We treat people as people and not as patients.”

Without denying the medical realities of quarantine and monitoring for symptoms of Ebola, Wilshire has emphasized to Troh their relationship to her and her relationship to God.

“There are all sorts of other consequences, but she’s Louise, and we remind her of that. She’s a child of God, and she’s part of our lives,” Mason said.

In her Sunday sermon, Carlson noted Wilshire’s experience with the media has been good, but there are those out there “who have been unkind and who have more of a political agenda, who have used Eric and Louise for their own ends, to make their own points and who have not treated them with the full dignity of human beings.”

‘First persons and not patients’

“What we need to try to do is to tell an alternative version of this human drama,” she said. “Our job is to remember that Louise was baptized here this summer, and that the whole family are our neighbors, and most of all to remind ourselves and others that they are first persons and not

patients.”

Mason visited Troh and members of her family in quarantine, observing recommended precautions. He delivered a packet of about 100 notes church members wrote to her.

“Her face just lit up,” he described the scene. “She was really thrilled to get that communication. I was able to leave a Bible with her, and we were able to talk at a spiritual level, because that is our contribution to this.”