

Breathtaking loss

Community rallies to support family after deadly fire

By [Austin Jackson](#) | Published on December 23, 2020



REMEMBERING THEM – A vigil has grown outside the home of the Martinez-Marin family following a house fire that resulted in three deaths Dec. 17 in Decatur. *Messenger* photo by Austin Jackson

A blue toy truck stands just outside the reach of black ashes and twisted metal in Meadowlake Village in Decatur. Steps away, beyond a collection of candles, Teddy bears, pictures and yellow tape is where a father and two of his children died in a house fire Dec. 17.

The survivors from the fire, including a mother and child, spent the next day recovering from burns at Parkland Hospital in Dallas before returning to Decatur.

“She has nothing,” said Erica Aguilar, an acquaintance of the family, referring to Erika Marin, 38.

Joel Martinez Ramirez, 50, **Jose Emmanuel Aguilar Marin**, 19, and their youngest daughter, **Luz Antonia Martinez**, 1, died in the fire, Aguilar, confirmed through a family friend. Services for the three will be held at 10 a.m. Tuesday (Dec. 29) at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in Decatur. Burial will follow in Oaklawn Cemetery in Decatur.

The devastation of a Decatur family sent shockwaves through the community, area schools and church congregations. It’s been at least 30 years since the Decatur Fire Department responded to a fire scene with such severe and breathtaking loss, said Decatur Fire Chief Nate Mara. Members of the department are still reeling.

“We’re used to dealing with tragedy and responding to people’s worst day, but what we’re not accustomed to is a family being torn apart like that,” Mara said. “Multiple injured and multiple fatalities in one fire is not something that most fire departments deal with, certainly not in a small town like Decatur.”

The cause of the fire has yet to be determined. Mara said he believes it was accidental at this time. The Tarrant County Arson Task Force is still investigating.

In the days that have followed the fire, the community has stepped in to help Marin, her sons Roberto Nahum, 14, and Karol Joel Martinez, 9.



SOMBER SCENE – A house fire resulted in three deaths last week, leaving the Decatur community in anguish. *Messenger* photo by Austin Jackson

Aguilar said she was approached by the family to help set up the GoFundMe. In three days, the fundraiser has raised \$26,000.

The Martinez-Marín family were members of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Decatur. Erika Marín sings in the choir.

At the church Saturday, Aguilar and other members helped sell more than 230 dozen tamales with proceeds going to the family. They sold out within hours.

On Sunday, the church sold street tacos in the parking lot. Aguilar said they went through 600 pounds of meat and once again sold out. In total, the tamales and tacos raised nearly \$15,000, she said.

The outpouring of support has been vast, and at times, overwhelming, Aguilar said.

“We had people from different religions, different races, different cultures, none of that mattered,” Aguilar said. “We had people from all walks of life. Some people donated \$1; it’s what they had to give. Some donated \$1,000. So many people came together. The support, it was overwhelming.”

Helping out was how Aguilar found a way to cope with the tragedy.

She said she hasn’t been able to sleep, and hasn’t gone a day without breaking down in tears.

Staying busy, manning the phones and the orders has helped.

Sunday, Aguilar said she presented the proceeds from tacos and tamales to the Martinez-Marín family at the hotel room they’ve been staying in.

“She’s very, very, very affected,” Aguilar said. “She told me her family didn’t deserve this.”

To donate to the Martinez-Marín family, visit: wcmess.com/fundraiser.