

Families of Missing Cruise Passengers Pray for Miracle

Italian authorities called off rescue operations Wednesday after the toppled **Costa Concordia cruise ship** shifted on the rocks near the Tuscan coast.

Officials are concerned about the safety of the divers who continue to search for 21 people still missing after last Friday's disaster. The death toll stands at 11.

More than 4,200 people were on board when the ship struck a reef not far from the **Italian island of Giglio**.

Now, as families continue to wait, prayers are pouring in.

The friends and church family of **Jerry and Barbara Heil**, an elderly couple from Minnesota who were vacationing on the ship, will hold a candlelight vigil in their honor Wednesday night.

The Heils have been members of St. Pius the 10th Catholic Church in White Bear Lake since 1973. The church has become a focal point as members pray for the couple's safe return.

Church Operations Director Larry Erickson told Minnesota's National Public Radio that his parishioners remain hopeful. He said the Heils have long been leaders in the parish.

"I see them every day going to Mass. What's really neat is they're always together. They walk side by side. They're as much one as they are the two people," he said.

Praying for Son's Return

A family in Mumbai, India, is also hoping and praying for a miracle.

Russel Rebello was working as a steward aboard the Costa

Concordia. His family found out about the disaster Sunday while reading the local paper two days after the disaster.

"I am hoping for a miracle. I want my son back. I do not want to lose my son," Russel's mother Gladys told New Delhi Television.

The recruiting company that hired Russel first told the Rebellos their son was safe. But that view changed when his brother Kevin, who lives in Milan, went to the Tuscan coast to find Russel and couldn't.

"We were praying the whole night, hoping to get some positive news from Kevin. But he called on Monday afternoon to say that Russel was nowhere to be found and that the local officials were not cooperating," Gladys recalled.

"None of the government officials, from Delhi or the Indian embassy in Italy, have contacted us til now. Even the recruiting company is tight-lipped about the matter," she added.

Criminal charges including manslaughter and abandoning ship are expected to be filed by prosecutors against Capt. **Francesco Schettino** in coming days. Schettino faces a possible 12 years in prison if convicted of the abandoning ship charge alone.

Authorities are also concerned about the possible **environmental impact** of the ship's remaining 500,000 gallons of fuel, should it begin leaking into the sea.