

Remains of Tennessee Church Leaders Discovered After Plane Crashes Into Lake

Tennessee officials identified the remains of seven individuals from a plane that crashed into Percy Priest Lake Saturday, including that of Christian diet guru and local church founder Gwen Shamblin Lara.

The Brentwood, Tennessee, passengers boarded the flight from Smyrna Airport—approximately 25 miles outside Nashville—bound for the Palm Beach International Airport, per the Rutherford County Fire and Rescue Facebook page. The group was traveling to a Women Fighting For America event in Stuart, Florida, according to multiple news reports.

The investigation started with the Rutherford Country Fire Department and local first responders working around the clock to sweep the half-mile debris radius with the help of drones. After four days, the first responders identified the bodies as William J. Lara, Gwen S. Lara, Jennifer J. Martin, David L. Martin, Jessica Walters, Jonathan Walters and Brandon Hannah.

The seven individuals served at Remnant Fellowship Church in Brentwood, Tennessee. Gwen Lara and her husband, William, founded the church in 1999. Gwen Lara was an author, best known for her faith-based diet book, *The Weigh Down Diet*, which served as the basis for her “The Weigh Down Workshop” Bible study program. William Lara, known as Joe Lara, voiced Tarzan in the mid-90’s TV series, *Tarzan: The Epic Adventures*.

Staff at Remnant Fellowship Church issued a statement reflecting on how to best continue the mission of its founders, Gwen and William Lara, to help “people find a relationship with God.”

"Gwen Shamblyn Lara was one of the world's most kind, gentle, and selfless mother and wife, and a loyal, caring, supportive best friend to all. She lived every day laying down her own life to ensure that others could find a relationship with God," the statement reads.

Because of her work in the ministry, Lara's memory "will remain for a long time" in the hearts of the "millions" she's touched over the years.

Elizabeth Hannah, Gwen and William's daughter and widow of Brandon Hannah, who also died in the crash, also spoke of her mother's impact for the kingdom in a press release posted on the County Fire and Rescue Facebook page.

"Her actions and words changed thousands of lives for the better. And her message of "Loving God with all your heart" will live on forever and ever—and continue to change lives for all eternity," she wrote.

Of her husband, she said, "My beloved husband, Brandon Hannah, took on this message of love for God first—and he truly was one of the most selfless and loving spouses and fathers on the planet."

She continued with a call for those who have lost hope to find it in Christ and seek refuge in a faith community. "The whole world needs to know that for those who have lost hope, they will find hope and peace and love in the message poured out from Remnant Fellowship."

She concluded, "These amazing seven leaders will go down in history as some of the finest Christians anyone could ever meet."

Gwen Lara leaves behind two children and their families. Jessica and Jonathan Walters have three young children. Jennifer and David Martin have five children and multiple grandchildren. And Brandon Hannah is survived by his wife, Elizabeth Hannah, and four children.

The National Transportation Safety Board is leading the investigation of the crash, which officials have said could take one to two years to complete.

“I cannot say enough about the teamwork of all agencies represented from our local public safety agencies to our federal partners,” said Rutherford County Public Safety Director Chris Clark. “Our teams are all committed to doing absolutely everything we can to bring closure during this very tragic situation.”

The church canceled its May 30 Sunday morning service and has not publicly announced memorial or funeral details. {eo}

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