

# NASA Facts

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For Release

Feb. 6, 2003

**Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe  
NASA Administrator  
STS-107 Crew Memorial Worship Service  
National Cathedral  
Washington**

To be an astronaut, is to accept a lofty calling.

The seven daring souls who we grieve for today represented the best of the human spirit...They did their chosen calling proud....They had a special grace.

Today, we pay tribute to the Columbia astronauts for what they did for us in carrying on the great tradition of the select few we call astronauts.

For over forty years, these remarkable men and women, whom we have all come to know proudly wearing their orange spacesuits and blue flight jackets, have played one of history’s most unique diplomatic roles.

Acting in peace for all mankind they serve as our good will ambassadors to the universe.

Every time we send humans into space, our astronauts look up to the starry firmament, seeking to extend our horizons throughout the vast expanse of God’s creation.

Our explorers go forward into the unknown with hope and faith. As Commander Rick Husband said, “There is no way that you can look at the stars, at the Earth, at the moon, and not come to realize that there is a God out there who has a plan and who laid out the universe.”

In this magnificent Cathedral, a portion of the lunar surface, brought back to Earth by moonwalkers Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, is encased in a precious stained glass window.

As we worship today in celebration of seven wonderful lives, this glorious window reminds us that the exploration of space will go on, propelled by the human urge to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield, and by our common faith in our creator.

Our astronauts also have another role. By pursuing research to improve people's lives and expand our understanding of the natural world, these brave individuals help pioneer the future in ways undreamed of by our ancestors.

This was the noble work that joyfully motivated our seven courageous Columbia astronauts when they ascended to the heavens three weeks ago.

Now some day, due to our astronaut's dedicated space research, we may have better means of fighting cancer, of delivering life saving drugs, and of helping our parents and grandparents stay healthy throughout their lives. We will always thank the crew of STS-107 for their passionate commitment to this cause.

Of course our astronauts count on all the talented men and women of the NASA family represented here today to help advance these ambitious research objectives.

They are amazing people, these public servants who make up the NASA family. Every day our scientists, engineers, safety and support folks come to work at our Centers thankful for the opportunity to engage in such exciting, meaningful work on behalf of the American people.

It is through their efforts that we are making tangible progress in our quest to improve aviation safety and efficiency, promote medical discoveries, probe more deeply into the mysteries of the universe, explore the planets, and better understand the dynamics of Earth's climate system.

And while this is a difficult period for the men and women of the NASA family, we will persevere. The support that we have received from the astronaut's families, from the President and Vice President, and from the Nation has given us tremendous strength. We will not let you down.

Throughout this period of mourning, the brave families of the Columbia crew have been rocks of courage and dignity, providing much comfort to the Nation and inspiration to us all. Dave Brown's parents Paul and Dorothy, along his brother Doug are here today leading I'm told a very impressive contingent of the Brown family. As are John and Iain Clark, Laurel Clark's family, and Master Sergeant Jimmy Daniely, Mike Anderson's brother-in-law. To you and to all the families of the Columbia astronauts, we thank you for your incredible fortitude.

To honor the legacy of the Columbia astronauts we have made a solemn commitment to their families to find the cause of the Shuttle accident, correct what problems we find and safely move forward with our work.

Motivated by our mission goals of understanding and protecting our home planet, exploring the Universe and searching for life, and inspiring the next generation of explorers, we will make good on this commitment.

The last element of our mission, inspiring the next generation of explorers, is very important to NASA...It's a **passion** of ours. And because the memory of the gallant STS-107 crew has done so much to inspire our youth—our shining hope for the future—to carry forward the torch of exploration and discovery, we are forever grateful to our Columbia astronauts.

As you can imagine, NASA has received a tremendous outpouring of condolences for the loss of the Columbia crew from people throughout the world. And it has struck me how folks have pointed out the unique hold that our astronauts have on the young and young at heart.

One gracious letter came to us from Rosemary Callaghan, the fifth grade teacher at Arlington, Virginia's St. Charles School. She wrote her letter after her students took time to write their own letters of condolence. And we thank them for their heartfelt gesture. And to represent her students, we are honored to have Rosemary with us here today.

I'd like to read to you from her letter, which was written on Monday. "Today on the chalkboard I wrote the definition of a hero – a person admired for bravery, great deeds, or noble qualities.

“In the wake of the tragedy of Columbia and its astronauts, seven people have come to light as modern day heroes. But they were heroes, people of great character and depth long before Saturday.

“When profiled in the media they were recognized for their spirit, great intellect with a desire to learn and give to others, well-rounded people who could function together as a team, people who grabbed at life for the great and the simple things.”

“Indeed...they were the best!”

Rosemary concluded her graceful note by writing, “Our children continue to need heroes – real heroes. May your beloved astronauts continue to inspire all of you to move forward. Your hearts are heavy now. In time, God grant you a light heart again.”

In this time of enormous sadness, these words from the Book of Revelation are most comforting: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” The writer speaks of those who are at rest with God. These words also have significance for us, who are still here on our Earthly pilgrimage. God will wipe the tears away from our eyes. Our hope is not ultimately a hope grounded in the progress of human achievement, as remarkable as that may be. Rather it is a hope grounded in the creator who calls Rick, Willie, Michael, Kulpana, David, Laurel, Ilan and each of us by name. May he have the faith to lift our eyes toward the heavens, as they did, and find there God’s peace.

May God bless the crew of STS-107, and may he lighten the hearts of their families and all who mourn for these valiant heroes.