YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT that a head of state was being mourned in Manayunk this past week.

A thousand people descended upon St. John the Baptist Church on Thursday evening to pay respects to the family of Shane Montgomery during a four-hour viewing that went into overtime to accommodate the grieving.

Police, who had to direct heavy traffic around the majestic Rector St. church, were back in action yesterday morning to manage the hordes attending the second viewing for Shane at 9 a.m., followed by Mass.

But by 8:30 a.m., the line of mourners was already out the door. Each somberly and patiently waited to comfort Shane's parents, Karen and Kevin, brother Tom and dreams of aunts, uncles and cousins — each resembling a different version of the next. (As one of Shane's relatives told me, “I'm related to half of Roxborough; the other half I went to school with.”)

The mourners were Shane's lifelong neighbors, who scoured the town when he went missing. His old classmates from Roman Catholic High and new ones from West Chester University, their faces stunned with grief. Members of the Philadelphia Police Marine Unit, who tried desperately to find Shane. And so many weeping others who clung to Shane's family, determined, it seemed, to hug him back into their lives.

The parade ended only when a priest announced that Mass was to begin and asked us to squeeze tighter into the old pews to accommodate everyone needing a seat.

And so we scrunched up our shoulders and shoved jackets and pocketbooks under the kneelers. And then we collided in the aisles when it was time to receive Holy Communion as the soloist sang, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have called you, and you are mine.”

All this, for a 21-year-old whose laid-back life had barely begun to kick into grown-up gear.

All this, for a funny young man with crazy red hair, sweet green eyes and a narrow frame that hadn't yet broadened to do justice to the huge Celtic cross tattoo he'd inked on his shoulder to proclaim his Irish pride.

Why Shane? I thought, as we cried during eulogies given by his broken-hearted brother and strong, dear mother. Why so many priests — I lost count at five — on the altar for that young man? Why so many strangers joining Shane's shattered family and friends on a morning whose frigid temperature would be unpleasant enough to brave for a loved one, let alone a person we'd never met?

The answer, of course, is why not Shane? Doesn't every young person who dies so “swiftly, cruelly and tragically,” to quote from Msgr. Kevin Lawrence's homily, deserve such fanfare? Doesn't every life ended too soon deserve crowds enormous enough to reflect the enormity of the potential that has been lost?

Terribly, the reason so many of us knew of Shane at all was because of the way his life ended. He went missing in the early hours of Thanksgiving after partying with friends. Had his body been found the next day, it would've barely made a tragic headline, and then Shane would've been gone from public consciousness.

But Shane's body was not recovered from the Schuylkill for 38 days. During those weeks, when his remarkable kin, strong neighborhood and devoted church family joined together to find him, their howl of agony was loud enough to bring the larger Philadelphia community stampeding forward to help.

It is unnatural for parents to lose a child. It is a horror to not know where he is. The public recognized that and responded as though the family's nightmare was their own. That powerful, collective act of love and compassion shows what we are capable of when we know people are hurting and don't ignore our innate urge to help.

In his homily, Msgr. Lawrence read from a letter written by a stranger to Shane, after his body was found.

"In a world of uncertainty, anger,
confusion and greed,” the man wrote, “you unknowingly created a moment of love and solidarity for so many. People loved a little more, sympathized a little more. We valued and cherished each other a little more.

“Nothing will ever take away the sadness but know that your life had purpose for me and for so many . . . You changed us. You reminded us how to take care of each other.”

Shane’s loved ones also showed us how to care for each other. Over 38 days, the city got to see what a strong, faithful, loyal and loving family looks like. They drew people to them, just as I know so many other good families in the city would draw us to them if we knew their hurt.

How do we hear their howls of agony, too, when we don’t have 38 days to let them sink in? I don’t know, but Shane’s family has helped me, and maybe others, see that it’s a question that deserves answering.

Because the love that has carried Shane’s family is surely strong enough to carry others who grieve, too.

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I GREW UP in a neighborhood where even the really bad kids could be brought back in line when someone tattooed them to their moms. That’s why I picked up the phone on Thursday and called the 92-year-old mother of Comcast Corporation’s chairman and CEO Brian Roberts.

We all know that Roberts’ company has been very, very bad. Comcast is in the news every other day with another irate customer’s tale of horrible treatment from the behemoth cable provider.

Last week, for instance, somebody at Comcast changed the first name of a customer from “Ricardo” to “A-hole” on the final bill sent to him.

Why so nasty?

His wife had canceled their Comcast service.

Then there was customer Ryan Block, held phone hostage for 18 minutes by a crazed Comcast “retention specialist” (a Comcast euphemism for a--hole?) who refused Block’s request to cancel his services. Block recorded the Kafkaesque babble and posted it on the Web, where it has been streamed a bajillion times.

And should you crave more examples of Comcast’s contempt for the Little Guy, click the “like” button on Facebook’s “I Hate Comcast” page and lose yourself in users’ creative tales of frustration — like Joel Walden’s satirical “Ode to Comcast.” The 20-stanza poem about Comcast’s inability to give a crap ends with resigned acceptance:

So let us not dwell endlessly On how much Comcast sucks; Their neglect and lazy service, And their non-arriving trucks. Their apathy’s intentional,

So don’t get mad or nervous. Just go on and grab those ankles, It’s all part of that Comcast service!

But the story that made me tattle on Brian Roberts to his mom was the one shared via an email sent to me by a sweet young couple named Diana and Jason Airolidi, recent Philly transplants from Washington, D.C. They’ve been trying since Dec. 23 to get Comcast to hook them up.

That’s right. In almost the same amount of time it took Noah to float the Ark, the country’s biggest cable company and home Internet-service provider hasn’t been able to turn on the Internet and cable in the Airolidis humble South Street apartment.

“Our complex is a Comcast-only building, so it’s not even like we can try a different cable company,” says Diana, 33, who works in the hospitality industry. Jason, 38, works for the feds. “We have no choice but to use Comcast.”

I could have called Charlie Herrin on the couple’s behalf. He’s Comcast’s new head of “customer experience,” appointed to “ensure that we are delighting our customers at each touch point,” trilled company CEO Neil Smit about Herrin’s arrival. But Smit added that fixing the company’s broken “customer experience” wouldn’t happen overnight.

“In fact,” he said, “it may take a few years before we can honestly say that a great customer experience is something we’re known for.”

A few years?

I imagined the Airolidis aging in place, their TV and computers rusting from disuse, the Super Bowls they’d miss, the unwatched seasons of “Downton Abbey” and “Scandal,” the piled-up Vine videos.

And something in me cracked.

“Enough!” I said, furiously dialing Brian Roberts’ mom (whose private number I wrangled from an insider). “It’s time his mother hears what he’s been up to!”

If anyone would take pity on the Airolidis, it would surely be Suzanne Roberts, lively wife of Comcast founder Ralph. She’s also host of “Seeking Solutions With Suzanne,” Comcast’s talk show about life after 50.

Surely she had a solution for the Airolidis?

I was disappointed when Mrs. Roberts phone was answered not by her but by her very pleasant assistant, Sharon. I told her what the Airolidis had been through.

“I’m so sorry to hear that, I’ll run this by Mrs. Roberts,” said Sharon sympathetically.

Fewer than 18 hours later, I heard from Denise Daniele, the personal assistant of Ralph Roberts.

“How can I help?” she asked.

I described how Comcast had missed or messed up 14 appointments with the Airolidis. Told her about the 13 days of missed work, between them, waiting for cable technicians who never showed. The hours they’d spent on the phone explaining, again, what had gone wrong. The time that a customer-service rep told them their account had been deleted because they’d obviously “declined” to activate their service.

“That’s awful, and totally unacceptable,” said Daniele (a refrain the Airolidis heard every time they made a complaint to Comcast, to no avail). “I will call them and get this fixed.”

Three hours later, Diana Airolidi called, breathless.

“I have never seen so many Comcast trucks in front of our building!” she said. “There’s a couple technicians, there’s a supervisor. They say they’re going to fix this today! They’re inside right now!”

And three hours after that — Holy Suzanne! — the Airolidis were finally connected. But their joy was tempered by the news, shared by a Comcast technician, that another Comcast customer would suffer because of the Airolidis’ good fortune.

“He said that they had to cancel someone else to take care of us,” says Jason.

What a spiteful thing to tell a customer.

I’ll admit that I never imagined that, in helping the Airolidis, I’d unwittingly screw someone else out of the opportunity to wait for a technician to not show up.

As for Jason, he feels bad that someone else will have to wait a few more days for service.

“But after 14 missed appointments, an adjustment needed to be made,” he says. “Maybe this is unfair to someone else, but Comcast needed to think about that a long time ago.”

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Mercy available, as long as you’re straight

ATTENTION ALL YOU divorced, remarried, pill-popping, Viagra-chewing, infertility busting, masturbating and/or unmarried fornicating employees of Waldron Mercy Academy:

Your days are numbered. If longtime and deeply loved Waldron teacher Margie Winters got the boot for being a married gay lady, it’s only a matter of time before you’re kicked to the Catholic school’s curb too for disrespecting church doctrine.

Oh, hell, who am I kidding? If Waldron is like other Catholic schools that have fired nervous gays for being themselves, its administrators will continue to look the other way when their hetero employees behave in ways that aren’t by-the-Catholic-book either.

The book is crystal clear by the way.
Divorce, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is “a grave offense against the natural law” that is “truly a plague on society” because of the “disorder” it creates in the family and community.

Divorced people who remarry are “in a situation of public and permanent adultery.”

Masturbation is “an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.”

Fornication — the “carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman” — is “gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality.”

The act of using donated eggs or sperm to conceive is “gravely immoral.”

The act of using one’s own sperm or eggs for the same reason is “perhaps less reprehensible, yet ... morally unacceptable.”

As for homosexual relations, they are “acts of grave depravity” and “intrinsically disordered.”

That’s one steaming pile of gravity, depravity and disorder, isn’t it?

Yet only Winters has been fired at Waldron — a school where, one parent tells me, employees are no strangers to divorce and remarriage and where others, for sure, are in unmarried sexual relationships.

The same selective firing process was used at Bensalem’s Holy Ghost Preparatory School in 2013, where longtime language teacher Michael Griffin was let go for marrying his partner. Oddly, divorced and remarried straight employees were left alone, as was a male teacher who knocked up his girlfriend: Instead of showing him the door, Holy Ghost showed him the love with a baby shower held on school premises.

I guess one man’s grave offense is another man’s gift-wrapped Diaper Genie.

The same discriminatory logic went down at Chestnut Hill College in 2011, when Catholic administrators canned highly regarded adjunct professor Jim St. George after they learned he was gay and married. Hetero employees were never held to the same standards as St. George, a priest in the Anti-Catholic Church, which allows its priests — gay or straight, male or female — to wed.

And it’s old news that Catholic priests in Philly who raped kids enjoyed decades of job security in archdiocesan schools, even though paragraph 2,389 of the catechism says that sexual abuse by adults on children entrusted to their care “marks a regression to animality.”

So let’s call Winters’ firing what it is: An act of despicable discrimination based on nothing but her homosexuality. As such, the firing is itself a violation of the catechism’s directive about how to treat homosexuals, spelled out in paragraph 2,358: “Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”

Yet who’s gonna punish Waldron Principal Nell Stetser for violating that command?

Certainly not Sr. Patricia Vetra-no, president of the Mid-Atlantic Community of the Sisters of Mercy, which runs Waldron. In her letter to parents, she reiterated support of Winters’ firing.

And — duh — not Philadelphia Archbishop Chaput, either. In a statement, he said Waldron’s leaders had “shown character and common sense at a moment when both seem to be uncommon.”

It is the school’s right to fire Winters, by the way. As a private religious institution, according to Penn constitutional law professor Kermit Roosevelt, Waldron can fire whomever it wants for whatever reason it wants. Besides, gays have no legal protection whatsoever when it comes to employment. So the law is on Waldron’s side here.

But Winters’ supporters — almost 11,500 of whom have signed a petition for her reinstatement — sure aren’t.

“This has been crushing,” one long-time Waldron parent told me, describing the anguish he and his wife are feeling as they decide whether to withdraw their child from Waldron because of the way Winters has been treated. “We felt like we’d found that magic little place when we found Waldron.

Margie was the face of mercy for us. It’s not like she was out there screaming about homosexuality. They had asked her to stay below the radar and that’s what she did. And then they fired her.”

Stetser, in a statement, said that she fired Winters to “sustain the Catholic identity at Waldron Mercy Academy. For the privilege of calling ourselves Catholic, we adhere to the teachings of the Catholic church.”

Except when they don’t.

That’s one gravely disordered identity.

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PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS — Philly.com

Wednesday, July 15, 2015
We needed this so badly.
We needed a week to ponder big questions about God, love and why we’re here. To say out loud that strong societies are made of strong families — the ones we create and the ones that, guided by the hand of the divine, find us and hold us tight.

And we needed to spin in the orbit of Pope Francis, an ordinary man, who, early in his papacy, offered an extraordinary analogy of the church he was chosen to shepherd.

“I see the church as a field hospital after battle,” he said. “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, the wounds . . .”

There were so many transcendent moments during the weekend wrap-up of the 2015 World Meeting of Families. The one that put the first of many lumps in my throat happened Saturday afternoon when the pontiff walked onto a modest podium at Independence Hall for his speech about religious liberty and immigration.

As he stepped slowly toward the lectern used by Abraham Lincoln to deliver the Gettysburg Address, the Philly Pops Festival Brass played American composer Aaron Copland’s stirring “Fanfare for the Common Man.”

We’ve all heard its noble strains before — usually appropriated as the soundtrack to maudlin TV sports montages. Its soaring notes provide emotional ballast to slo-mo footage of an athlete’s solitary predawn workouts on the ice rink, or in the lap pool, or around a snowy track for the thousandth time.

In the closing frames, we see the athlete standing in gold-medal glory, victorious over those whose best wasn’t good enough.

A winner, separate and untouched. No longer common.

How lonely and sad.

On Saturday, Copland’s gorgeous composition was finally paired with the right subject: Pope Francis, a humble man who celebrates the magnificence of all, especially those despairing alone on society’s margins — the poor, the elderly, the disabled, the incarcerated, the abandoned.

His words and countenance this weekend were so peaceful and relaxed, he was able to telegraph a truth we didn’t know we were desperate to hear until we heard it:

We are blessed and worthy just as we are, so abundantly loved by God that we have nothing to lose by loving others. There is no scarcity. So we can stop grabbing at status, hoarding comforts and yearning for a win, because those things never will fill the hole we think we’re filling.

Pope Francis greets female prisoners at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility yesterday.

But love will — and only when it’s given away. Not just to some, but to all, at all times.

The pope of hope made it all seem so simple. Not easy, but simple. His brand of love is available to all of us to exercise; we needn’t wait for the perfect time, the perfect person, the perfect reason.

We can just love, right now.

What a message for an entire city to bathe in for two astounding days. I feel bad for those who fled Philly before Pope Francis got here, who didn’t get to feel peace and love thicken the air the way humidity does in summer.

The peaceful, joyous vibe that lit the Ben Franklin Parkway this weekend was a tonic to the glitz and din of the Made in America concert that overtook the same space just three weeks ago. Nothing against Jay Z, Beyonce and the outsized entertainers who growled, howled, thrust and strutted during a weekend of Budweiser-sponsored exhibitionism.

Hey, it’s what they do.

But we were long overdue to balance out all the ego, noise, partying and wealth of our public mega-events with something low-tech and high-heart, whose spectacle came not from strobe lights and sick beats but from a holy man’s megawatt smile.

We just didn’t know we needed the rightsizing until we experienced it for ourselves.

Despite the security overkill, the overhead choppers, the military presence on every corner (but what friendly and polite men and women they were!), the power of the pope’s message came through with the intimacy of a whisper:

Common men and women doing the common work of loving the world is all we need to live extraordinary lives. It all starts with us.

And we can start right now.
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GREED BETWEEN THE LINES
HEY, URBAN OUTFITTERS: WHAT’S WITH THIS ‘ON-CALL’ POLICY FOR PART-TIMERS?
POLANECZKY, PAGE 3

The chain’s Walnut Street store was bustling last night.
URBAN Blight

Exploitative on-call staffing is bringing down our local retail chain

URBAN Outfitters, you're breaking my heart.

I'd loved you since I discovered your lone West Philly shop when I was in college. You'd just changed your name from the Free People Store, and your countercultural merchandise spoke to my giddy dreams of a boho life. I was smitten the day I bought an Indian-print cotton bedspread from you to sew into curtains for my first-ever single-girl apartment.

“Where'd you get them?” friends would ask, eyeing my handiwork.

“Urban,” I'd say, knowing the word had become code for “I may be broke, but at least I'm hip.”

God, I was young.

Since then, you've become more successful than I have, morphing into a $1 billion global behemoth that also encompasses the brands Free People, Anthropologie, Bhldn and Terrain. Your clothes still skew to the young demographic I used to belong to, so I'd taken to scanning your racks for Christmas gifts for my clothes-horse teenager.

She got to wear your cute stuff and I got to maintain a touchstone relationship with a company that had put down roots in Philly, as I had, and never left. It made me happy.

Sure, your price tags indicated you'd gotten a tad full of yourself ($89 for a cotton/poly romper? Really?). And you'd stumbled embarrassingly in attempts to be edgy (a shirt evocative of the one the Nazis made gay concentration-camp prisoners wear? What were you thinking?).

URBAN Outfitters schedules workers for on-call shifts. But if they're not called in, they're not paid.

Still, Urban, I'd cut you slack the way family cuts slack to kin. You've remained a player in a city that has lost too many homegrown businesses to either bankruptcy or foreign soil. That counts for a lot in my book.

You may not be perfect, I'd always told myself, but you’re ours. But Urban — oh, Urban. I've been learning about the way you treat your part-time employees, the young, mostly female staff who work in your retail stores. And I’m ashamed of you.

For years, you've subjected them to an enslaving scheduling system that betrays your “free people” roots. Basically, you give them their schedule only a few days in advance, with some shifts designated as “on call.” But they don't know, until three hours before the shift is to begin, whether you need them to work that shift or not. If not, they don't get paid.

Yet they're required to hold that time for you, in case you do.

“On calls are considered scheduled shifts, and the same attendance policy applies,” your employee handbook says.

All I can ask, Urban, is: What the hell? But your PR flacks didn't respond to my questions.

The use of “on-call” staffing is obviously necessary in medical and first-responder fields, where lives depend on workers being available when needed. Reasonable people know it’s part of the gig. But using the same scheduling to ensure that a billion-dollar retailer doesn’t “waste” money on excess workers during a slow day at the shop?

C'mon, Urban. It's horrible.

The unpredictability means employees can't schedule classes, if they're in school. Or go to a second job, so they can cobble together a full-time salary. Or reliably arrange child care or pay their bills, since their cost to do both remains fixed even though their working hours don't.

Their only compensation, if I read the handbook correctly, is that they get to keep their jobs so you can continue to exploit their need to make a living.

“It’s pretty messed up,” one of your employees told me when I asked her about the policy. I won't say which of your 179 U.S. stores employs her, since she needs her crappy job. She’s toiling through college and doesn’t know, week to week, what her paycheck will be.

“It’s hard to plan,” she said.

She could get a job at a different store, but it seems you’re not the only retail chain doing this.

Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, and L Brand Inc.'s Victoria's Secret and Bath & Body Works are some of the other billion-dollar corporations whose on-call scheduling have wreaked havoc on their workers. The practice began about 10 years ago, says Carrie Gleason, as globalization increased retail competition and companies needed new ways to shave expenses.

“They started incorporating new technology into scheduling that used software algorithms” to track store traffic, the time of year, even weather patterns, says Gleason, director of the fair-work-
POLANECZKY
Continued from Preceding Page

week initiative at the Center for Popular Democracy.

But the predictions aren’t perfect, so on-call staffing provides wiggle room to keep labor costs down. Retailers also tie store managers’ bonuses to how low they keep labor costs.

How can you stand being part of this, Urban?

In April, New York state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman called companies like you on the carpet, following his investigation into the legality of on-call staffing at 13 retailers whose New York stores employ thousands of low-wage Americans.

As a result, big changes have happened.

Victoria’s Secret and Bath & Body Works stopped the practice nationwide. Abercrombie and Gap say that nationally they, too, are phasing out on-call shifts.

But you, Urban, are dragging your feet. You’ll stop the practice in New York, you announced this month, but everywhere else it’ll be exploitation as usual.

Which means you’re doing the right thing in New York only because New York law requires you to. As for everywhere else, it’s human decency be damned.

“If Urban found a business model to let them stop on-call shifts in New York, they ought to be able to find a business model that will let them stop the shifts everywhere else,” says Lance Haver, formerly the city’s consumer advocate and now director of civic engagement for City Council.

“If they don’t, then consumers can say we’re not going to shop at their stores until they change their practice. We can refuse to support a store that abuses the people who wait on us.”

Haver also thinks the only way to assure that businesses like you, Urban, treat employees better is for your workers to organize.

“People say there’s no longer a reason for people to join unions,” he says, “but that’s because they don’t know about these disgusting practices.”

Lest you think, Urban, that all your employees are miffed with you, that’s not the case. I spoke with one employee, a fan, who asked not to be named because she’s hoping to work her way into your corporate headquarters at the Navy Yard. She sees her on-call schedule as a necessary evil, given the vagaries of the retail market.

“The company has to do right by its shareholders,” she told me. “I think they’re stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

Except that your company founder and CEO, former hippie and current billionaire Richard Hayne, owns most of your stock.

He has the clout to end on-call staffing. That’s not being between a rock and a hard place. It’s holding the power position.

Please, Urban, return to your roots and free your people. And please start in Philly.

Because family comes first.

Would the hippie Richard Hayne that founded Urban in the ’70s approve of billionaire Richard Hayne’s current staffing policies?