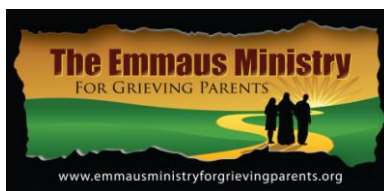




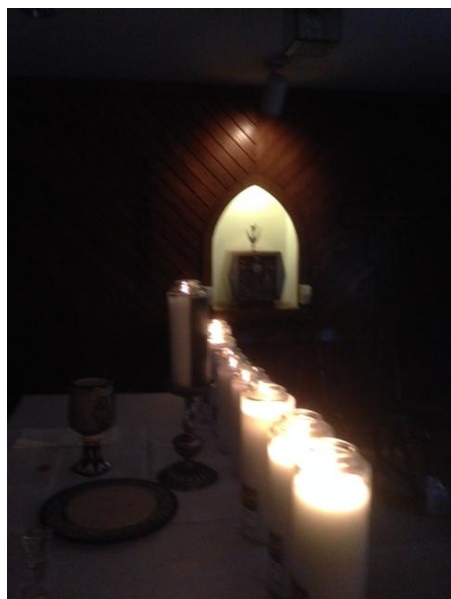
SAN DAMIANO HOUSE OF PRAYER



THE EMMAUS MINISTRY FOR GRIEVING PARENTS

January 22, 2015

Dear Friends:



On a dark, dreary, raw January Sunday last week, fourteen people gathered for a One-Day Retreat at San Damiano House of Prayer in Lowell, MA. Eleven were grieving parents who had lost sons or daughters, several as recently as six months ago; three were spiritual leaders, including Sr. Linda Greenwood, OSF who hosted the event.

As the day progressed, the weather outside mattered less and less as the warmth of the house and the participants' compassion for each other brightened the day considerably.

Susanne and Larry Conley, Emmaus Parent Companions and parents of Abby, Missy, and Maria, graciously purchased, prepared, and served all of the meals and refreshments throughout the day, in loving memory of their beautiful children.

During the Opening Prayer Service, Fr. Eric Carpine, OFM from Boston's St. Anthony Shrine, invited parents to think about Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. *"The darkness of Good Friday was dispelled by the brilliant light of Easter Sunday...and so it is today,"* he said. *"Because He conquered death, His light lives on—just as the light of your children lives on—and will never die."*

He then asked parents to take the taper, draw light from the central candle, and use it to light the candle of their child—symbolizing the unity of the children and Christ in eternal life. As always, this was a very moving ritual punctuated by the soft lighting in the beautiful chapel and the quiet music playing in the background.

After the Opening Prayer Service, Sr. Linda gave a very moving reflection. *"Death is a mystery,"* she said, *"It creates a very deep wound in our hearts and through our whole being."* She invited parents to find peace in this House of Prayer, *"to tenderly nurture your wounds; to ask the questions you need to say aloud; and to find comfort with others who have a similar pain."*

*“Life is a journey that brings us back to God,” she said, “ So, in that place that St. Francis calls ‘Sister Death’... one by one, we are welcomed by God—and by the many we have loved who have gone on before us. And we will welcome those who come after us. What a reunion it will be!”*she said.

Then she spoke of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and her grief...*what does it look like... how does it feel... what does it teach us...*

Sr. Linda concluded her thoughts on Mary and her reflection by inviting parents to listen to a beautiful recording of [“Still Her Little Child” by Ray Boltz](#), a song that reiterates the fact that, no matter what, Jesus was still Mary’s little child. No matter what... our child is still our little child.

After a short break, the group gathered for a favorite part of the day, “Parent Witnessing.” Donna McLaughlin graciously began the session by telling the story of her spiritual journey after the death of her son, Johnny.

Preoccupied with taking care of her daughter and Johnny’s four children, Donna said she never had time to grieve. *“But, as you know,”* she said, *“you don’t get away with not grieving.”*

Stating that she was angry with God, Donna said she drifted away from the Church until one day the realization came to her that she had already lost too much by losing her son; she was not going to also lose her faith. Since that time she has learned that it is not true that time heals all wounds, but it is true that time at least stops the worst of the bleeding.

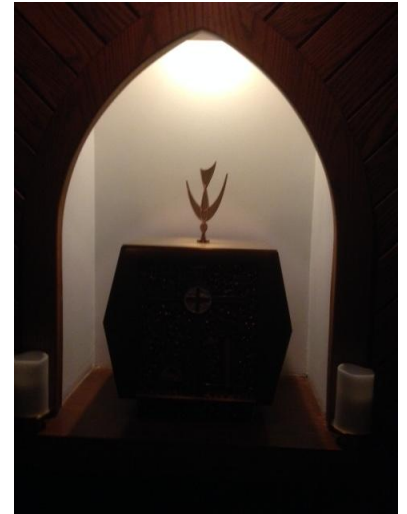
Next, Charley Monaghan gave witness as a grieving father whose spiritual journey has been long and tortuous. Charley talked about putting his son, Paul, in a box and not letting him out because he did not want to hurt any more. He talked about questioning everything in life and what he truly believed... about his agonizing journey of trying to find Paul and not knowing where to look.

“And now my concerns are that I forget. I forget what he smelled like, how he walked, and some of those funny little gestures that he used to make. Sometimes I almost wish the pain of the early days would return so that I can be certain that he was here, that he did exist,” Charley said. Eventually, Charley did find Paul. *“Today I stand before you no longer ashamed or reluctant to witness what I now fully believe to be the truth”* he said...

“God does exist; He does love me, you, and our children more than we will every imagine; He did not cause them to die, and He has no desire to punish us. He only permits suffering because He knows that we can use it for good and joy, if we but let Him in. Our children are not dead. Their spirits are very much alive and they are with Him—waiting for us..”

Afterwards, mothers and fathers gathered in small groups. Mothers talked about the sad fact that we are not in control of our lives, even though we think we are and we want to be. They talked about the need for social action to fight drug abuse and addiction. Fathers talked about parenting special needs children, masculine crying, and praying to a God who seems to be a paper tiger when excruciating prayers appear to go unanswered.

Later parents wrote letters that will remain at San Damiano House of Prayer and continue to be held in prayer. They will eventually be burned...prayer rising like incense in a special ceremony in the spring.



The Mass in the Chapel was beautiful. Fr. Eric approached each parent with the laying on of hands and the Sacrament of the Anointing. He explained that the sacrament was for anyone physically, mentally, or emotionally in need of healing.

Peggy Hassett gave an insightful homily on John's Gospel. Jesus was being followed and turns to face the three behind Him. *"What are you looking for?"* He says. Peggy asked the group, *"What are you looking for? Are you looking for someone to give you all the answers? Are you looking for a ray of hope? How do you climb out of your pool of hurts?"*



"The answer," she said, "can be found in what you are looking for. It is found in your making a choice. Is your search on what to DO or on to BE? When you search for and choose to BE, you are allowing God to BE the control; you are allowing yourself to be guided by and led by the loving compassionate Spirit of God." "In choosing to BE," she said, "you will find that where God awaits you. He is there to place His hand under every burden you carry, to cover every sorrow with his love, to ride every cresting wave in the storm with you, easing the pain and anguish, bringing a blessed calm... leaving His Divine Presence and Power at your disposal."

After an uplifting Closing Prayer Service and a beautiful blessing by Fr. Eric sending us forth into the world, another Emmaus Ministry Retreat for Grieving Parents ended. Days later now, many of us still feel the "glow" of the Holy Spirit and the warm companionship of each other.

Wishing you much peace and comfort, as always,
Diane