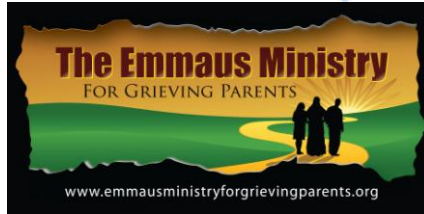




St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center



November 30, 2014

Dear Friends:

It's been a gratifying November for the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents—with three programs offered during the first nine days! The One-Day Retreat at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church in Hartford CT, the return of the Monthly Meeting/Coffee Social at the Shrine in Boston—and our weekend Shrine retreat at Miramar Retreat Center in Duxbury, MA. Please see *“Past Programs”* on our website for more information on what happened in Hartford.



In Duxbury, as soon as parents began arriving early Friday evening, the weekend felt extra special. As we progressed through Saturday and Sunday, that initial feeling was proven true. Here is what parents had to say about the retreat...

“I have never been more at home or more comfortable with a group of strangers who, thanks to the Holy Spirit, are no longer strangers and who provided me with real love, compassion, and understanding.”

“I have a new appreciation for how my spirituality can be improved and how far I have progressed in my journey. “

“It met my needs in addressing my shattered spiritual journey.”

“I have been (spiritually) dead for 22 years. Now I feel that I am coming back to life.”

“We will cherish it.”

“I will never be able to put into words my gratitude—and how humbling and powerful and beautiful it was, even amidst so much heartbreak and pain.”

More than 30 parents registered for the retreat, our largest group ever. We believe reducing the cost of attending the retreat significantly increased the number of parents able to attend. Because the new registration fee covers only about 36% of our actual costs, we have begun fundraising efforts to subsidize future retreats.

Members of the retreat team included Fr. Tom Conway OFM, Bro. John Maganzini OFM, Bro. Don Champagne SVD, Peggy Hassett, Claire & Steve Michlovitz, Kris & Mary Piper, Lynda Marandos, Donna LaPointe, Barbara Murray, Larry Conley, Donna Berkeley, Beth Rapoza, and Charley & Diane Monaghan. We extend extra special thanks to Larry Conley and Donna Berkeley who stepped in, on very short notice, to keep vigil in the chapel with the candles. Thanks Larry and Donna!

When we entered the darkened chapel Friday night, Bro. John reminded us that the light of the Pascal candle represents the light of Christ and that our children's candles represent our own light and the light of our children joined together with Christ.

As each parent lit their child's candle, the soft glow slowly grew with each one and the chapel, no longer cold and dark, slowly became warm and inviting. *"I am the Light of the World,"* said Christ, *"Whoever believes in me, even though he dies, will live forever"* So, too, do our children.

The next day Bro. John led the Morning Prayer Service focused on opening the eyes of our hearts, the prayer of St. Francis, and the Prayer of a Grieving Parent. Next Bro. John offered an extremely moving reflection in which he stated with strong conviction and certain knowledge that heaven is indeed for real.

He said our children are with God and part of the Communion of Saints. He compared life to a journey across a bridge with the certainty of eternal life on the other side. He suggested bundling our issues and giving them to the Lord...finding joy, patience, perseverance, and prayer in each day. Concluding with a recording of *"Surely the Presence of the Lord is in This Place,"* many parents were visibly moved by this very poignant reflection.



Next three parents gave witness to their particular faith journeys. One parent spoke about going from a lukewarm Catholic to depending on her faith for healing and sustenance. Another parent described her anger at God for taking her daughter after she did everything right and in her power as a single Mom, saying she still struggles with this. A third parent talked about asking why...why her son? Why now?



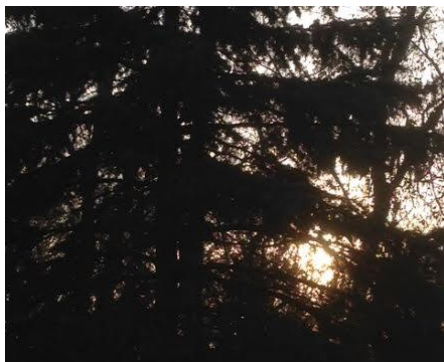
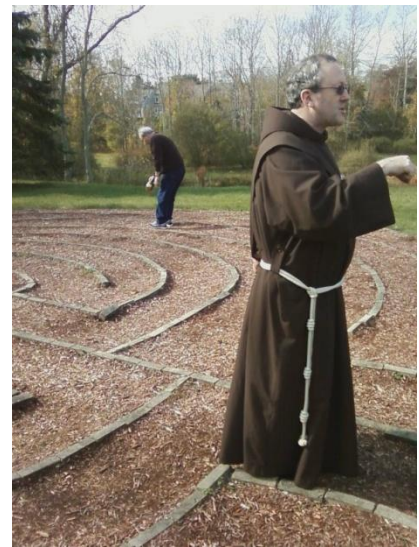
Mothers and fathers then gathered separately. Several mothers talked about putting their pain in a box for years and sometimes feeling abandoned by God, with others said they now felt feeling closer to God than ever before. Fathers talked about their feelings of failure at not being able to protect their children.

Then, as always, the Emmaus Walk proved fruitful as many parents commented, *“I know why the Holy Spirit partnered me with him/her; it was so obvious.”*

New to this retreat was a cocktail/appetizer hour before dinner, giving parents the opportunity to get to know each other even better. The Evening Prayer Service was touching, with letter writing, laying on of hands, and anointing by Fr. Tom. A much-needed social in the center’s inviting living room followed the service.

Sunday morning at Mass Fr. Tom exhorted us to use our spiritual imaginations to focus on the spirituality of opposites, i.e. while we want our children to be with us physically at Christmas, imagine them not with us, but with God.

Invoking Psalm 141 Charley burned the letters that we had written to our children. After Mass, we processed with the ashes from the letters to the beautiful Labyrinth of Miramar. Fr. Tom gave a striking reflection on the use of ashes and incense as prayer—and how appropriate it is to scatter the ashes along the various paths of the labyrinth where others will come to pray for many days in the future. He also reiterated the fact that as two or more were gathered here, we were definitely on Holy Ground at Miramar.



As always, the Closing Prayer Service after lunch on Sunday was beautiful and comforting. Fr. Tom reminded us that, while we were extinguishing the wick of the candles memorializing our children, the light of their lives will live on forever. And, with that, this very special weekend retreat serving the spiritual needs of grieving parents ended. All of us who were there will carry its warmth and comfort for many days to come.