

## October 24, 2015 Retreat for Grieving Parents St. Patrick-St. Anthony, Hartford, CT

On Saturday, October 24, 2015 the Franciscan Friars and parishioners of St. Patrick-St. Anthony, Hartford, CT (“SPSA”) welcomed twenty-four grieving parents to SPSA’s 3rd annual one-day retreat for grieving parents. Once again, Jean Jarvis, mother of Steven, headed up the publicity — we had 12 new attendees! — and morning hospitality efforts.

Our day began in the Chapel, where the chairs were arranged in four rows, two rows facing two rows, with a beautiful, circular-topped table in the middle on which we would soon place our children’s candles. Sister Ginny Sheehan, SND, led a guided meditation facilitating our transition from the outside hubbub to the internal, sacred space. Fr. Tom Gallagher, ofm, then led our morning prayer service. Following “Prayer for those Making a Retreat” and the singing of “Open my Eyes”, the candles were blessed and parents lit their child’s candle from the Paschal Candle. Our prayer service concluded with “On Eagle’s Wings”.

Several parents chose to linger in this sacred space while others went next door to the Franciscan Center for coffee and cake. We regrouped for a brief reflection by Fr. Tom on the appearance of Jesus to Thomas (John 20:24-29). Within minutes, we were fully engaged in sharing stories of the wounds and the gifts of our children, alternating between tears and laughter, both deeply cathartic.

Fr. Tom presided over the celebration of the Eucharist in the Chapel at noon, with laying on of hands and anointing with chrism. After the closing hymn, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light”, we returned to the Center to lunch served by SPSA hospitality ministers.

After lunch, we paired up for the Emmaus walk. Upon returning, many parents elected to meet in small groups of 5 or 6, facilitated by Sr. Ginny, SND, or Trudi White, and some opted for time alone with their child in the Chapel.

We concluded our formal program in the Chapel with a closing prayer service at 5:00. After praying “We Remember Them”, parents who were attending their first retreat were enfolded in prayer shawls made by members of this SPSA ministry. (Returning parents were invited to bring their prayer shawls with them which was fortuitous as the heat wasn’t working in the Chapel!)

The Friars graciously opened their home to us after the formal program ended and several parents retired for a few final moments of fellowship before offering their valediction: “See you next year!”

Prepared by Natalie Wheatall Welsh, Jacky’s Mom  
January 16, 2016

