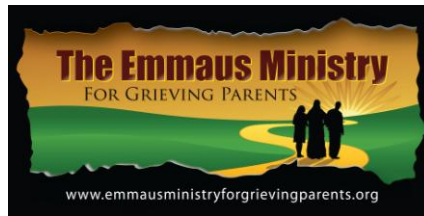




St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center



Weekend Spiritual Retreat Miramar Retreat Center November 6-8, 2015

You know it is an unusual fall in New England when you are wearing short sleeve shirts and sandals in November. But that's what some of us did November 6-8 at our annual St. Anthony Shrine weekend retreat at Miramar Retreat Center in Duxbury, MA. It was a beautiful weekend inside and out of the center.



We welcomed more than 20 parents from five states (MA, NH, VT, FL, and NY) and Canada (our first international couple, thanks to the Holy Spirit and the internet!). For some parents it had been only a few months since the loss of their precious child; for others it had been many years. All came in search of peace and comfort.

Joining us briefly at the retreat also was Rick Snizek, a reporter who wanted to write a story about the Emmaus Ministry coming soon to Rhode Island. (See the Addendum at the end of this article for Rick's story, which appeared in the November edition of *Rhode Island Catholic* newspaper.)

Members of the Retreat Team included...

- Fr. Eric Carpine, OFM: Spiritual Leader, Celebrant, Confessor, Presenter
- Peggy Hassett: Spiritual Leader, Spiritual Director
- Br. Don Champagne, OVM: Music Ministry
- Tom & Tricia O'Brian: Retreat Sponsorship in loving memory of Marisol

- Karen Gueniot Kornegay: Memorial Candles in loving memory of Dylan
- Barbara and Rocco Favuzzi: Candle Vigil Volunteers and Hospitality in loving memory of Dan
- Claire & Steve Michlovitz: Hospitality and Parent Witnessing in loving memory of David
- Gwenn Hendrick: Parent Witnessing in loving memory of Frank
- Mary Berry: Parent Witnessing in loving memory of Lauren
- Barbara Murray Hospitality in loving memory of Melissa
- Caroline and Peter Bertozzi: Candle Vigil Volunteers, Hospitality in loving memory of Nick
- Lois Diamond: Monthly meeting in loving memory of Eric
- Beth Rapoza: Memorial Candles in loving memory of Paul
- Charley and Diane Monaghan, Retreat Coordination in loving memory of Paul
- More than 20 Candle Vigil Volunteers
- All Emmaus Ministry benefactors and donors.

It was gratifying to see how many parents and supporters were eager to serve on this retreat team. The ministry has truly evolved over the years into a parent-led program, answering the Church's and the pope's call to *new evangelization of the laity*.



Particularly heartwarming were the many volunteers who came to Miramar for numerous hours from 7pm Friday night to 1pm Sunday afternoon to sit in vigil with our beautiful candles. Friends and family members from local parishes, prayer groups, confirmation classes, and honor societies joined us in Miramar's lovely chapel to reflect and pray—and to ensure the safety of the candles. Many were visibly moved by what they experienced there.

The setting at Miramar is particularly inviting for a retreat such as this. It offers acres and acres of beautiful woodlands and a labyrinth outside—as well as the warmth and contentment of a cozy home inside.

After a delicious dinner, we opened the retreat with the very moving Candle Lighting Ceremony. Several local Emmaus Parent Companions joined us. Charley reminded us of how and why candles are used in our faith to represent the light of Christ and

the light of our children, neither of which ever dies. Experiencing the darkened chapel slowly come alive with the brightly burning flames of the Paschal Candle and the candles of our children was poignant, to say the least.

A wonderful wine, cheese and pastry social followed in the retreat center's very comfortable living room. In a totally relaxed setting, parents were able to get to know each other better and experience (many, for the first time) a safe place to laugh, cry, and talk about our beloved children with other parents who "get it."

The next day opened with a breakfast buffet and our Morning Prayer Service. We prayed the "*Prayer of a Parent on the Loss of a Child*," sang "Open My Eyes, Lord," and "*The Prayer of St. Francis*."

Next Fr. Eric gave his very moving reflection on "*Treasured Sorrows*." He played Sarah Hart's song, "*Child of My Heart*," and told us of how the friars at St. Anthony Shrine in Boston have been and are praying for us.



He read "The Potter's Poem" and spoke of all the people in his life who have companioned him. He told us how close he was to his mother and how he was taken aback when, totally distraught about his mother's impending death, a friend confronted him asking why he was so sad and where was his faith.

He felt completely alone and misunderstood at the time—and wondered if God knew that he loved him. This, he said, was a "treasured sorrow."

As we walk this most challenging journey, he said, we have guides to teach us wisdom... to help us take "from the meat of our sorrow, the marrow of our saintliness." These are tools of faith. We utterly depend on God during our treasured sorrows. We go to the Eucharist, the Potter, to be strengthened.

Crying is cleansing, he said. We put our sorrow out there and it is a good thing. Sometimes we need to stop working so hard on this journey—and let God perform his miracles in us. Let the Potter do his work...

*“Praise the Lord all you nations, glorify him, all you people
For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the Lord endures
forever.” --Psalm 117*

After a short break, we reconvened for Parent Witnessing. This is the time when parents who have been to previous retreats share with us where they are currently in their spiritual journeys. For many, it is a cathartic experience.

Claire M. shared her long and winding spiritual road since the death of her beloved son, David. It is like a roller coaster, she said, that never ends. She does find consolation in consoling others—which is a pillar of the Emmaus Ministry’s mission.

Mary B. followed sharing that she is not particularly religious, but that she totally believes her beautiful daughter is home with God and that life never ends. She recommended the book, *“The Shack,”* and said she believes her daughter is in God’s arms.

Gwen H’s son died a long and painful death from cancer. Her depiction of him writhing in pain in bed, positioned exactly the same as Christ on the cross, was heart wrenching. And her many examples of the presence of the Holy Spirit were awe-inspiring.



Parent Witnessing is always one of the most moving and inspirational parts of our retreats. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit calls each of these parents to share where they are in their particular spiritual journeys. There are no right or wrong answers. It is what it is. We know that other parents are there at this particular moment in time to hear what they have to say. In the near future, we hope to publish Parent Witnessing talks on our website, so other parents can share in this experience.

Next we separated into small groups of mothers and fathers. Mothers talked about the effects of death on siblings and ways to ensure children that they will indeed see their brothers and sisters again. They also talked about the effects of the death of a child on a marriage...very difficult.

In the fathers’ group, several wanted to talk and tell their stories over and over again; others wanted to listen.

What distinguishes The Emmaus Ministry from support groups is that, as we tell everyone up front, we are not psychotherapists and we are not even trained facilitators. The mission of the ministry is to provide parents with the opportunity to

focus on their own, individual spiritual journeys—which is completely different from anyone else’s in the world.



We provide the time and the space—and the rest is up to the parent and the children and the Holy Spirit. That is the purpose and the mission of these retreats and that is the reason many parents join us over and over again. Our grief journey will not end until our glorious reunion happens in heaven.

Consequently, we never “go around the room” and have parents introduce themselves or tell their stories. Spiritual journeys are highly private and personal and not everyone is willing or able to share. Many people, as we say, participate by listening.

The Emmaus Walk, when parents can talk one-on-one (reminiscent of Jesus’ walk to Emmaus with his disciples) is particularly wonderful at Miramar because of the setting. Together, parents can take a short walk to the bay, the labyrinth, the outdoor stations—or enjoy the many paths and benches right outside the front doors of the center.



Parents then drifted to wherever they felt comfortable and wrote letters...to their children...to God... to whomever they felt the need to communicate at that particular time. In prayer, these letters were eventually burned, mixed with incense, walked in procession outside, then spread over the labyrinth, to be prayed over by many more visitors to Miramar to come in the years ahead.

After a short break, parents were given the option of going to Reconciliation, Spiritual Direction, the Labyrinth, Outdoor Stations of the Cross for Grieving Parents, Consolation Through Music, or having prayerful reflection in the chapel.

A coffee, soda, and wine pre-dinner social hour followed...Again, a good chance to get to know each other and experience the wonderful, newfound (for many) freedom of talking about our children without fear of judgment or condemnation.

After another wonderful dinner, we made our way into our short twilight Evening Prayer Service where, on the altar, we presented the letters we had written earlier in the day, had the laying on of hands, and received the beautifully healing Sacrament of Anointing.



Then we relaxed with a dessert social in the comfortable living room and continued to bond with each other—some until very late that night. For many of us, this is the only opportunity we have to talk with other parents who do, truly, understand. From each other we find comfort.

The Mass the next day was absolutely beautiful. One part of Fr. Eric’s Mass that is always inspiring is when, at various times during the Mass, he does not say “The Lord BE with you,” to which we answer, *“And with your spirit.”* Fr. Eric always says, *“The Lord IS with you,”* to which we respond, *“And is with your spirit.”* Huge difference.

One of the most poignant highlights of this entire retreat was Fr. Eric’s blessing at the end of Mass on Sunday. He sent us forth with the message... *“You are not parents who have lost a child. Your child is not lost. Your child is with God. You know where your child is. Never refer to yourself as a parent of a “lost” child. Your child is very much alive and with you today and always.* Very comforting to those of us who grieve what we used to say are “our lost children” every day. Thank you, Fr. Eric.

And so, after a nourishing breakfast as the brilliant sunshine filled the retreat center’s dining room and an inspiring Closing Prayer Service, another Emmaus Ministry Weekend Retreat for Grieving Parent ended.

And, at least for a time, the glow of the presence of our children and the Holy Spirit filled our hearts.



Addendum



Finding comfort after unbearable loss

Emmaus Bereavement Ministry to help R.I. parents cope with the death of a child



FINDING SOLACE: From left, Barbara Murray, of Tiverton; Joelle and Paul Elliot, of Montreal; and Peggy Hassett, of Chelmsford, Mass., remember their loved ones who have passed as they participate in a session at Miramar Retreat Center in Duxbury, Mass., this past weekend. The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents retreat will be offered at St. Theresa Church in Tiverton on Saturday, Nov. 21. All are invited to attend regardless of the age of the child lost or the amount of time passed.

RICK SNIZEK

Posted: Thursday, November 12, 2015 12:00 am

BY RICK SNIZEK, EDITOR

DUXBURY, Mass. — They came from near and far in search of healing through a very special ministry dedicated to providing comfort to parents who have lost a child. In a chapel, amid the warm glow of candles, each labeled with the name of a child who has passed – from newborn through adult – parents gathered to remember their loved ones, sharing laughter, as well as tears.

In a corner near the windows, during a break between sessions of the weekend retreat, parents bond over the same heartbreak they both have experienced. A mother from Montreal leans in to comfort a mother from Tiverton, R.I., both knowing the feeling of loss in their lives.



Joelle Elliott drove with her husband Paul to this seaside Massachusetts hamlet from their native Montreal after reading online about the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents.

This unique, Catholic ongoing program serving the spiritual needs of parents was started in 2009 by the Franciscan Friars at St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center in Boston, in collaboration with Diane and Charley Monaghan, who sought healing following the death of their son Paul in 2002.

The parents of three, the Elliotts lost their fourth child, Thomas, to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome on August 19. He was only five weeks old.

“It’s hard to get time to grieve and to think about all these things with the other three kids at home,” Joelle said of the opportunity for reflection on their loss afforded by the weekend retreat.

**Joelle Elliott at the Emmaus Ministry
Weekend Retreat in Duxbury, MA**

“So, just time being away and being together has been really helpful and seeing everybody else going through different, but similar things too, they understand and you don’t have to do anything. You can just be yourself. That’s really nice too.”

While the mother with whom she shared an embrace while holding candles lit in remembrance of their departed loved ones traveled a much shorter distance to take part in the retreat, the journey for any parent who outlives a child is no less arduous.

Despite the very methodical way of thinking that Barbara Murray employs in her career as an engineer, she still finds it difficult to process the death of Melissa, her beloved daughter

who died nearly two years ago at age 32, a loss she describes painfully as “sudden and accidental.”

Murray, a parishioner at St. Theresa Church in Tiverton, learned about The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents and has now become involved as a team leader. Murray has been working with Father Przemyslaw “Shemek” Lepak, pastor of St. Theresa and St. Christopher parishes in Tiverton to make the program accessible locally.

On Saturday, Nov. 21, St. Theresa Parish, in cooperation with The Emmaus Ministry will offer a “One-Day Spiritual Retreat for Grieving Parents” at the church, 265 Stafford Road in Tiverton, from 9:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. The retreat is open to anyone whose child of any age has died by any cause, no matter how long ago. All are welcome, regardless of situation or religion.

Participants will share in several activities during the course of the day including a prayer service, candle lighting in memory of their loved one, small group sharing sessions, reflections and letter writing. They will also celebrate Mass together.

“It’s a beautiful ministry. I hope it will be helpful for many parents,” Father Shemek said.

The pastor said he knows from experience how difficult it is for a parent to have to cope with the death of a son or daughter, whether young or grown, having been called upon to help bring comfort to several parishioners through the years in their times of loss.

“They wonder, how can this event — the death of a loved one — be part of God’s plan?” he said. They can either hold it inside or share it and acknowledge the suffering and pain, and Father Shemek views the retreat as an opportunity for parents to seek healing from the hurt they have been holding inside.

“We all need this on many levels,” he said. “We don’t have all the answers, no human being does.”

Murray said that parents who suffer the loss of a child have both a physical and emotional part of themselves ripped away, along with all the hopes and aspirations they had completely invested in their child.

“Many well-intentioned attempts exist to assist parents in recovering from their loss, including psychotherapy and support groups,” Murray said. “However, in an attempt to be all-inclusive and ‘politically correct,’ the spiritual need — or even the existence of God — is absent from many of these resources.”

For more information, or to register for the Nov. 21 retreat at St. Theresa, Barbara Murray may be reached at 401-624-8746. For more information on other upcoming Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents programs, visit www.emfgp.org.