

Emmaus Retreat Brings Comfort to Parents Who Have Suffered Loss of a Child

By Colleen Rowan

KEARNEYSVILLE—Fifteen parents who have suffered the loss of their children gathered at Priest Field Pastoral Center in Kearneysville this summer for the diocese's second Emmaus Retreat for Grieving Parents.

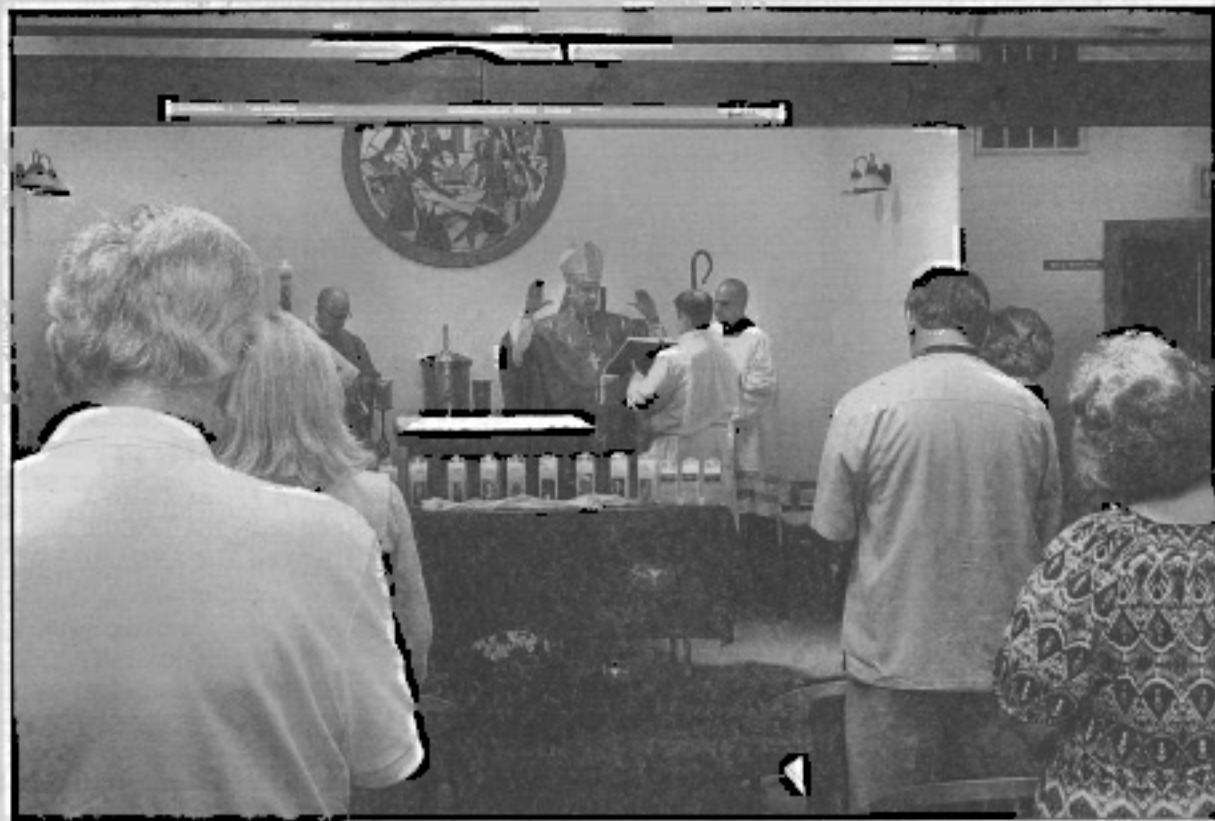
Sponsored by the diocese's Office of Faith Formation, Marriage and Family Life, the retreat was presented once again by the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents. The ministry is based in Boston and is presented by Diane Monaghan and her husband, who started the retreat after the loss of their only son.

The deceased children honored ranged in age of 17 to 46 and the time since their death ranged from six weeks to 20 years.

Bishop Michael J. Bransfield joined the group celebrating Mass for the grieving parents, sharing a reflection and then bestowing a blessing upon them. The retreat team included Father Dennis R. Schuelkens, Jr., director of seminarians for the diocese and pastor of Our Lady of Peace Parish in Wheeling; Rebecca Royse, Marriage and Family Life coordinator for the diocese; Father Eric Hall, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg; and many others. More than 500 people across the diocese and Emmaus parent companions also prayed a Novena for parents making the retreat.

The retreat began with an opening prayer service outside of the chapel at the pastoral center during which parents stated the names of their children and rang a 3,500 pound bell outside, then lit Emmaus memorial candles for their children with fire from the paschal candle. Father Schuelkens led the participants in a procession into the chapel and said that the light of the Emmaus memorial candles in front of the altar in the sanctuary represented "the light of our children, who are joined in loving union forever with the Lord."

The retreat ended with a closing prayer service after Mass where Father Hall asked parents to extinguish the flames of the Emmaus memorial candles, while remembering "that the light of the children lives on forever." As the can-



Bishop Michael J. Bransfield bestows a blessing on parents who have suffered the loss of a child during the Emmaus Retreat for Grieving Parents. Courtesy Photo

dles were extinguished, parents heard the pealing of the four Bells of Consolation and as they exited the chapel, each of them ringing the bell.

"It was a privilege to once again be a part of the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents Retreat in June," Royse said. "This year's retreat was an experience of healing and hope in which parents were able to feel comfortable sharing as much or little about their children as they wanted and could take time to ask themselves 'where do I feel the presence or absence of God in my grief over the death of my child?' I was honored to serve the parents in attendance and am grateful to the entire retreat team: Charley and Diane Monaghan, founders of The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents; Peggy Hassett and Brother David Schlatter, spiritual directors; and Father Dennis Schuelkens and Father Eric Hall, retreat chaplains for their willingness to serve and bear witness to the Gospel message of hope and life. The entire retreat team is grateful to Bishop Bransfield for the time he spent with the attendees, both in bestowing a blessing and in celebrating the Holy Mass on Pentecost Sunday."


Plans to support parents at the parish level are in process, Royse said. Those interested in more information, may contact Royse at royse@dwc.org or (304) 233-0880, ext. 333. Another weekend retreat

is being planned for Feb. 6-8. Details for both the retreat and parish events will be coming soon and the most recent information can be found at www.wvmarriage.org/emmasus.

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