

ST FRANCIS XAVIER-ST ALBERT THE GREAT COLLABORATIVE



EMMAUS MINSITRY ONE-DAY RETREAT January 14, 2017

“All the love that knit us together in life does not unravel at death.”

It was a crisp, sunny, winter day in New England as Emmaus retreat team members and participants made their way to St. Francis Xavier-St. Albert the Great Collaborative in South Weymouth, MA last Saturday morning for an Emmaus Ministry Retreat for Grieving Parents.

Nobody really knew what to expect, but their hopes were high. Check-in was a bit hectic because we welcomed several late registrants, but the Holy Spirit prevailed and, thanks to Barb and Rocco Favuzzi, it all worked out.

Members of the retreat team included:

- Fr. Charles Higgins, Pastor of St. Francis Xavier-St. Albert Collaborative, Reflection
- Elizabeth (Betsy) Clifford, Pastoral Associate, Retreat Coordination
- Deacon Joe and Patty Canova, Retreat Coordination
- Lauren Van Luling R.N., Volunteer and Food Service
- Barbara Greland R.N., Volunteer and Food service
- Nanci Campbell, Computer Communications and Baker
- MaryLou Maddalena, Volunteer and Food Service
- Carol Weese, Carol Clark, Jean Rouzaut, Parish Bakers
- St. Francis-St. Albert Prayer Shawl Ministry, Prayer Shawls
- Barb & Rocco Favuzzi, *In Loving Memory of Dan*, Candles, Retreat Coordination
- Charley & Diane Monaghan, *In Loving Memory of Paul*, Retreat Coordination

- Beth Rapoza, *In Loving Memory of Her Brother, Paul*, Candles, Parent Directory, Name Tags, Comfort Crosses
- All Donors & Benefactors of The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents, Financial Support Helping To Make These Retreats More Affordable

Joining us at this retreat were 22 parents: 7 from Weymouth and others from Dorchester, Hanson, Chicopee, Braintree, Randolph, East Boston, Waltham, Scituate, Quincy, Hanover, and Hingham. We honored 20 children: 15 are sons; 5 are daughters. Ages at the time of death ranged from birth to 51 years. Cause of death included stillbirth, heart attack, car accident, and suicide. Time since the death ranged from 3 months to 14 years.



The Opening Prayer Service was particularly moving as parents were reminded of the significance of Light and what it represents; they then lit the beautiful memorial candles of their children. Throughout the entire day, the image of Light stayed with us.

Fr. Charlie Higgins, pastor of the Collaborative, gave a phenomenal reflection. He talked about Mark, Chapter 4, and Jesus' calming of the sudden, unpredicted storm. The death of our children, no matter how old they were and how it happened, was a sudden, unpredicted storm that none of us wanted. "When this happens," he said, "we need to turn to Jesus."

The apostles in the boat saw that Jesus was asleep when this huge storm threatened their lives. *How could he sleep when all of this was happening? We ask the same question... How can he sleep when we are hurting so much? Why doesn't he hear us?* "He does hear us whenever we call him," said Fr. Charlie.



If we believe in Jesus and lead a good life, he will reward us and protect us, right? "Unfortunately, this is not the case," said Fr. Charlie. "There are absolutely no guarantees. We are not in control of the storm. Jesus is. He has a plan for us that is not hampered by illness, accident, or any other tragedy. He will prevail and one day we will be with him and with our children, no matter what happens here on earth."

"The good news is that Jesus looks at Death squarely in the eye—and conquers it—through his cross. His cross is our passageway way to walk, with our heads held high, through this reality into what he has prepared for us," said Fr. Charlie.

Fr. Charlie encourages us to "let Jesus take us to the 'other side of grief' ... where Jesus is not a spectator, but a comforter. He is our 'Chief Mourner.' He suffers *with* us; he suffers *for* us. With His Resurrection, He has given us the gift of hope... Death is definitely not the last word.

All the love that knit us together in life does not unravel at death. We can be assured that he is awake.”

After the Opening Reflection from Fr. Charlie, we heard a moving Parent Witnessing from Charley Monaghan who talked about his spiritual journey moving from having his son in a box to a meaningful relationship with God and with his child that now continues to grow.

Afterwards, small group sessions of mothers and fathers were fruitful. Some of the mothers focused on signs from their children. Others focused on using the death of their children to bring good in the world, and various ways to do so. Parents spread out all over the site and wrote letters to their children-or to God-and then regrouped. They also participated in an “Emmaus Walk” during which they shared their individual stories.

We celebrated Mass together with the parish and then enjoyed a delicious dinner. Afterwards, we had our Closing Prayer Service, during which we extinguished the wick of our children’s candles, but not their light. We remembered that no one can ever extinguish the true brilliance of their light, which lasts forever in our hearts and in heaven.

Parents had this to say about the retreat...

- *“I found this retreat more relevant than other bereavement groups. The loss of a child is a unique experience.”*
- *“I felt at peace today and will hopefully take it with me when I leave.”*
- *“I feel that I am not alone on this journey.”*
- *“I had no idea what to expect, but it was wonderful.”*
- *“This retreat was soothing to our broken spirits.”*

