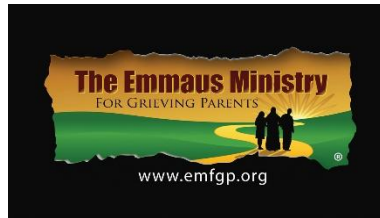




St. Matthew Parish Windham, NH



Serving the Spiritual Needs of Grieving Parents

One-Day Spiritual Retreat Saturday, June 17, 2017

“Out of the Ashes... Beauty Will Rise.”

Saturday, June 17 was a beautiful, sunny day in New England, though a bit hot and humid. We were happy to be going to our first-ever New Hampshire Emmaus Ministry Retreat.



St. Matthew's Parish in Windham opened its heart to 18 parents that day who were grieving the deaths of their precious children. From the first moment inside their beautiful Parish Center, it felt like a very calming, giant hug.

Members of the retreat team included Fr. Brian Kennedy, Pastor; Pat Donahue-Turner, Pastoral Associate; Genevieve Baudin, Retreat Coordinator and Sponsor; and parish volunteers Marcia Healey, Pat Kennedy, and Kevin Worthington. Emmaus Parent Companions included Barbara Murray, Barb and Rocco Favuzzi, Charley and Diane Monaghan, Claire Michlovitz, and Christina Madden.

Prayer Shawl Ministries from St Matthew's and St. John the Evangelist in Chelmsford provided beautiful shawls. St. Mathew's Rosary Ministry provided both traditional and bracelet rosaries, which were deeply appreciated.

We welcomed parents from four states: NH, MA, NY, and RI. We honored 12 children who died from illness, overdose, birth complications, suicide, and car

accidents. Ages at the time of death ranged from seven days to 39 years old. Time since the death ranged from 6 months ago to 63 years ago.

We have learned that being a parent whose child has died is a common denominator no matter how old the child, how he/she died, or how long ago. There was an instant connection, not usually found in other grief gatherings.



Our touching Opening Prayer Service, during which we talked about the light of Christ and the everlasting light of our children set the tone for the day. In his blessing of the candles and comfort crosses, Fr. Brian reminded us of the spark of light that originally occurred at the moment of our child's conception... the spark of light at the first moment of life.

Fr. Brian's spiritual reflection was particularly meaningful as he talked about our suffering as grieving parents. Fr. Brian's own mother suffered the death of not one, but two sons. Using his own insights as a priest and as the son of a grieving parent, Fr. Brian offered a true message of consolation.

He began his reflection by playing Steven Curtis Chapman's heartfelt "[Beauty Will Rise.](#)" The composer is an evangelical pastor whose beautiful five-year-old daughter died after she was hit by an SUV driven by his own son, who was backing out of their driveway. Heartbreak upon heartbreak.

Chapman's only comfort, as many of can relate, was turning to his faith, focusing on the fact that he did all he could as a parent, and believing that he will see his child again in heaven. The words to his song are deeply rooted in the Bible

Fr. Brian talked about the Book of Job in the Bible and the Psalms of Lamentation, both of which were written by people enduring intense, horrific suffering.

He then played Eric Clapton's "[Tears in Heaven?](#)" a song many of us know well because it was written after the heartbreaking death of the composer's two-year-old son. In his song, Clapton says he must be strong. This is different from the Chapman song we heard earlier, observed Fr. Brian. Chapman freely admits he can't handle the death of his daughter alone. He definitely needs God. (See Attachment II for the lyrics.)

Fr. Brian state... It all comes down to the answer to the question of what is God doing on the cross? Why did God have to die? He said his favorite answer to that question comes from Luke 20: 9-19.

This is the parable where the owner of a large and thriving vineyard gave his property away to others, in exchange for a share of the fruit. When harvest time came and he sent his representatives to collect his share, they were beaten by the ungrateful tenants. So he sent more representatives to collect his share, but they were not only beaten, but also killed. Totally dismayed, he decided to send his only son because he firmly believed they would surely respect *him* and do what was right. But the ingrates killed his precious son as well.

Fr. Brian believes this parable represents God, the Father, who sent his precious son to earth. We humans had a choice, said Fr. Brian. Jesus didn't have to die. He could have lived a very long and happy life preaching and teaching us how to live. But, like the tenants of the vineyard, we drove him away and we killed him. Consequently, God the Father, like us, wept at the death of his only son. As did Mary.

Fr. Brian then played an absolutely beautiful song by LeAnn Rimes supporting this interpretation, ["10,000 Angels Cried"](#)

"It must have looked like rain when 10,000 angels cried at the death of Jesus," she sings. What a powerful perspective on the crucifixion! (See Attachment III for the lyrics.)

Fr. Brian then talked about the Blessed Mother, who was one of the few people on earth who could see what was really happening. Why were these people torturing and killing their Savior? Do they not know what they are doing? How could anyone do something so horrific? She, above anyone else, saw our blindness. Her sadness was for us and for the situation, as well as for her son.



What is the true antidote for suffering? asked Fr. Brian. Citing answers given by Buddhists, Hindus, and Islamists as incomplete, Fr. Brian said the true answer comes from Jesus who said, "*Eat my body and drink my blood.*" In this way, Jesus is with us always in all ways, just as he was with us on the road to Emmaus.

Through the Eucharist, Jesus literally holds us in our grief, he said. Jesus is someone who experienced the absolute worst that the world can give, so he knows our pain, as does God the Father.

This was a particularly appropriate message for today, the feast of Corpus Christi. Receiving the body and the blood as often as we can is critical to our healing. Every time we receive the Eucharist, Jesus holds us.

Fr. Brian concluded by playing [“Held”](#) a poignant song by Natalie Grant, written after the death of her close friend’s infant son. It is almost like a Lamentation psalm. The most sacred thing in life we have is the life of our children. (See Attachment IV for lyrics)

Throughout the rest of the day, we were able to hear the very moving story of a Parent Witness who shared her spiritual journey during the life her special-needs child.

We were also able to meet as mothers or fathers, walk together one-on-one as grieving parents, experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation, find out more about Spiritual Direction, and write letters to our children or to God.



We talked a lot about angels in our midst and how amazing and miraculous it was that, for some of us, people unexplainably showed up when we needed them the most, particularly in hospital settings.

We acknowledged that everybody has a cross to bear. While many of us feel intense jealousy of families who don’t seem to be suffering any pain at all—and appear to be thriving tremendously in all ways—this is probably not true at all. We just don’t know their pain

We marveled about signs from our children and from God—and how they are very real, though many people “on the outside” may dismiss them as coincidence.

Nearing the end of the day, we joined St. Matthew parishioners in a beautiful Vigil Mass during which we heard Fr. Brian’s thought provoking homily. He warned against diagnosing ourselves in what we have to have. He encouraged us to embrace the Eucharist as often as possible for the spiritual nourishment, which is what we really need.

In a stirring Closing Prayer Service led by Peg Donahue-Turner, we concluded the retreat with prayer, song, procession , and an inspiring blessing sending us forth.

Yet another Emmaus Ministry Retreat ended on a very hopeful note, as we walked to our cars with the “glow of the Holy Spirit.”

After the retreat, parents had this to say....

“I met some amazingly strong people who inspired me with hope.”

“I found listening to Fr. Brian very soothing.”

“I was worried about such a long day, but it turned out it wasn't a problem at all.”

“Was a great experience, with a lot of sharing.”

“This retreat was very pleasant, calm, and healing.”

“This retreat helped me to be connected spiritually.”

We look forward to exploring opportunities for other spiritual retreats for grieving parents in NH in the future. If you would like to talk about bringing this powerful ministry to your area, please contact us at gbaudin@msn.com or diane@emfgp.org.



Attachment I

BEAUTY WILL RISE

Stephen Curtis Chapman

It was the day the world went wrong
I screamed till my voice was gone
And watched through the tears
As everything came crashing down

Slowly panic turns to pain
As we awake to what remains
And sift through the ashes
That are left behind

But buried deep beneath all our broken dreams
We have this hope

Out of the ashes
Beauty will rise
And we will dance among the ruins
We will see it with our own eyes

Out of these ashes
Beauty will rise
For we know joy is coming
In the morning

In the morning
Beauty will rise

So take another breath for now
And let the tears come washing down
And if you can't believe
I will believe for you

'Cause I have seen the signs of spring
Just watch and see

Out of these ashes,
Beauty will rise
And we will dance among the ruins

We will see it with our own eyes

Out of this darkness
New life will shine
And we'll know joy is coming in the morning

In the morning,
I can hear it in the distance
And it's not too far away
It's the music
And the laughter of a wedding and a feast

I can almost feel the hand of God
Reaching for my face to wipe the tears away
You say "It's time to make everything new
Making it all new"

This is our hope
This is a promise
This is our hope
This is a promise

It will take our breath away
To see the beauty that's been made
Out of the ashes
Out of the ashes

It will take our breath
To see the beauty that He's made out of the ashes
Out of the ashes
Out of the ashes

Attachment II

TEARS IN HEAVEN

Eric Clapton

Would you know my name
If I saw you in heaven?
Would it be the same
If I saw you in heaven?

I must be strong and carry on
'Cause I know I don't belong here in heaven

Would you hold my hand
If I saw you in heaven?
Would you help me stand
If I saw you in heaven?

I'll find my way through night and day
'Cuz I know I just can't stay here in heaven

Time can bring you down, time can bend your knees
Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please
Beyond the door there's peace I'm sure
And I know there'll be no more tears in heaven

Would you know my name
If I saw you in heaven?
Would it be the same
If I saw you in heaven?

I must be strong and carry on
'Cuz I know I don't belong here in heaven

Attachment III

10,000 ANGELS CRIED

LeAnn Rimes

Stillness Filled The Heavens On Crucifixion Day
Some Say It Rained I Don't Know If It's True
Well I Can Just Imagine Ten Thousand Angels Cried
That Would Seem Like Rain To Me And You

The Angels All Stood Ready To Take Him From The Tree
They Waited For The Words From His Voice
And When He Asked The Father Why Has Thou Forsaken Me
They Watched The Saviour Die Of His Own Choice

I've Never Seen Ten Thousand Angels Cry
But I'm Sure They Did
As They Stood By
And Watched The Saviour Die

God Turned His Head Away
He Couldn't Bear The Sight
It Must Have Looked Like Rain
When Ten Thousand Angels Cried

As The Sun Slipped Away
The Skies Turned To Grey
And When Jesus Gave His All
That's When The Tears Began To Fall

I've Never Seen Ten Thousand Angels Cry
But I'm Sure They Did
As They Stood By
And Watched The Saviour Die

God Turned His Head Away
He Couldn't Bear The Sight
It Must Have Looked Like Rain
When Ten Thousand Angels Cried

It Must Have Looked Like Rain
When Ten Thousand Angels Cried

Attachment IV

HELD

Natalie Grant

Two months is too little
They let him go
They had no sudden healing

To think that providence would
Take a child from his mother while she prays
Is appalling
Who told us we'd be rescued?

What has changed and why should we be saved from nightmares?
We're asking why this happens
To us who have died to live?
It's unfair
This is what it means to be held

How it feels when the sacred is torn from your life
And you survive
This is what it is to be loved
And to know that the promise was
When everything fell we'd be held

This hand is bitterness
We want to taste it, let the hatred numb our sorrow
The wise hands opens slowly to lilies of the valley and tomorrow
This is what it means to be held

How it feels when the sacred is torn from your life
And you survive
This is what it is to be loved
And to know that the promise was
When everything fell we'd be held

If hope is born of suffering
If this is only the beginning
Can we not wait for one hour watching for our Savior?
This is what it means to be held

How it feels when the sacred is torn from your life
And you survive
This is what it is to be loved
And to know that the promise was
When everything fell we'd be held