



St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center



WEEKEND RETREAT HIGHLIGHTS

November 3-5, 2017

Miramar Retreat Center, Duxbury, MA

THE DANCE CONTINUES...

It was an absolutely quintessential New England, deep-blue sky day as we traveled to Duxbury, MA for our weekend retreat November 3-5, 2017. Marred only by several traffic jams on the way down doubling the time of the trip, it was a spectacular day with unseasonably warm temperatures. The warm air seemed to be welcoming us.



We greeted parents from six states: MA, RI, NH, CT, NY, and MD. Weekend retreats help parents from outside of New England have a relaxing, affordable retreat experience. If parents can get to our local airport or train and bus stations, Emmaus Parent Companions can easily transport them to wherever the retreat is being held. This weekend was no exception.

Half of the group were couples; the other half, individual mothers. We honored 14 children. Three of them had died in the past seven months. Age at the time of death ranged from four years old to 48 years old. Cause of death included illness, drug overdose, and suicide. Time since the death ranged from four weeks to 16 years.

Members of the retreat team included several spiritual leaders, a music minister, and thirteen Emmaus Parent Companions who did everything from transporting

parents from Logan Airport to the retreat center to arranging for candle vigil volunteers to donating Memorial Candles and Comfort Crosses—and more. Compassionate outreach from parents who have previously participated in a retreat, and feel the desire to give back, is always gratifying and needed at every retreat.

At the Opening Prayer Service, parents lit beautiful Memorial Candles for their children after being reminded of the symbolism of light in the Catholic Church. Christ is the light of the world. When we co-created our children with Christ, we co-created an eternal being, whose light will never go out. The light of these candles symbolizes the Light of Christ and the steadfast light of our children that will live forever, not only in our hearts, but also in heaven.



As we moved through the retreat, there were many reflections and observations that gave much peace and comfort. Here are a few of them:

In reflecting on the death of a child, Fr. Jurgen had this to say...

- When you go to church, don't listen to the priest; listen to what God is saying to you.
- We live in a fallen world. The most visible expression that this world is fallen... that this world is not right... is the death of children.
- In the beginning, God created a perfect world. But it didn't stay perfect and we are living with the results of that fact.
- There is no deeper pain in human life than the death of a child.
- When I held my newborn daughter, I realized for the first time the abyss of potential pain that she carried. Opening oneself to incredible love opens oneself to incredible pain. The birth of a child personifies this love.



- In the Bible, Jesus raises people from the dead seven times: all of these raisings are of children, if you consider Lazarus a young adult. Is this because he knew of the particular, horrific pain of parents who experienced the death of a child?
- The death of a child is the work of the devil. Jesus Christ came to this world to destroy the work of the devil.

- Why do bad things happen to us? No one knows, not even the wisest theologians. It is the “Mystery of Iniquities.” Why do bad things happen to good people...the “Mystery of Iniquities.”
- God did not send us an answer to this question; he sent us his son, Jesus Christ.
- In sending us his son, God the Father, experienced the death of a son. He felt every dimension of the crucifixion and death of his son... just as Mary, the Mother of Sorrows experienced the Great Devastation, the death of her precious child.
- But it doesn't end there...All Good Fridays lead to Easter. All of our pain leads to joy. In the resurrection, Jesus Christ began a new creation. He rose from the dead; he conquered death. Death will never again have the last word. **The story of our children is not over.** Jesus. Himself, is the greatest of all miracles. All other miracles flow in and out of him.
- Do we give our children away in death, never to see them again? No! Our children are part of the Communion of Saints in the Catholic Church. They are very much alive and well and active in our lives today. But we need to work to establish a new relationship with them.



- When a loved one dies, according to C.S. Lewis, it's not like when a flower dies and it is over. A human life is not truncated when it dies. This life is not ended. It continues. Our children live on. Their bodily presence is no longer here, but their actual presence lives on—and will to eternity.
- We love—not just the *memory* of our children—but their *actual presence* in our lives today. Indeed, they are truly here.
- When we created our child, we entered into a commitment *forever*. Death doesn't end this relationship. While our relationship with our children profoundly changes without their bodily presence, we continue to build this new relationship with them spiritually every day. It's like a circle. The top half of the circle is the Earthly Circle; the bottom half of the circle is the heavenly Communion of Saints.
- After the death of his wife, in “A Grief Observed,” C.S. Lewis wrote that “Love is a dance.” We are totally transformed by the love of another. It changes us in every way. We dance together in total bliss. Then, the dance seemingly stops. Many of us believe that this is the end, but it is not.

- We need to ask the Lord to help us know how to continue the dance... help us know how to build this new, abstract relationship with our child,,, help us believe that it is even possible, because it is so.
- What is the one thing you wish you were able to do right now? Because of the resurrection of the body...you will definitely, be able to hug your precious son or daughter again. You will definitely be able give him/her a kiss. And you will definitely be able to know, without a doubt, that he/she is real. This will be the banquet of our personal heavenly kingdom.
- As St. Paul says, *“We grieve, but we grieve with hope.”*
- And...



THE DANCE CONTINUES...

Fr. Jurgen suggested a new addition to the retreat, which we appreciated and which we will continue in the future: an optional early morning Mass on Saturday. It was serenely beautiful to be in the chapel and the presence of the Blessed Sacrament so early.

In his homily at that Mass, Fr. Jurgen offered comforting words from St. Paul to the Corinthians telling us that we are now “looking through the glass darkly,” but eventually all will be clear to us.

“Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known.” (1 Corinthian 13:12)

We are looking forward to the day when we will understand all that has happened and why.

Other observations throughout the weekend included:

- On forgiveness and unforgiveness...
 - Forgiveness is the greatest revenge.
 - Unforgiveness is like taking rat poisoning and expecting the other person to die.
 - Unforgiveness is giving that person the right to live in your mind rent free.
- I need to use neuroplasticity to train my brain to think positively.
- My husband and I can be on different paths in our grief—and that is ok. But, at some point, those paths have to intersect.
- There are no coincidences. There was a reason why I was walking down that street that day and was literally drawn into the Shrine. The signs are real.
- I used to wail against the Church because it was not there for me after the funeral of my child, but now I have moved on.
- We didn't deserve this. We don't deserve anything. Actually, everything is a gift from God, including our children. They were not ours. We didn't own them. They were ours for a time and we did our absolute best.



Here are excerpts of what parents had to say after the retreat:

- *Every time I come to a retreat, something happens in my heart.*
- *I think the retreat reinforced how to maintain and build a relationship with my son, Jesus and myself. I was previously not confident in doing this.*
- *Yes, I always leave with a sense of peace and a renewed feeling of purpose.*
- *As always, this weekend was filled with comfort, peace, hope and love. It was a great blessing to share in all of the liturgy and discussions with other parents who truly understand. The Holy Spirit was lifting us up throughout the weekend.*
- *I leave very satisfied & feel a small opening in my heart where comfort & peace can come in.*
- *There is a solace being among people who know & share your grief that cannot be replicated.*

And...

“I wrote on the review this morning , that perhaps having a retreat for those who have lost a child to addiction would be beneficial, I wish I had not written that, as much as we all need help and guidance for our specific need, this weekend was so special, meeting other parents, whose loss was due to different circumstances, provided me an insight into their grief and an understanding that, regardless of the how or why , we are all in the same difficult place of finding peace and acceptance for the loss of our child , no matter our age , their age etc....

Placing the focus on the spiritual, not just the emotional aspect (or cause) of death has given me a different perspective for which I am grateful. “

Several parents requested the list of upcoming 2018 Emmaus Ministry retreats and a copy of the “*Bibliography of Books*” Recommended by *Grieving Parents for Grieving Parents*, which we will email to all immediately.

With these comments and after lots of hugs, yet another Emmaus Ministry weekend retreat ended.

