



Diocese of Phoenix, AZ

Emmaus Ministry retreats help bring healing to grieving parents

By
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Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents

When: April 3-6

Where: Franciscan Renewal Center, 5802 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale

Cost: \$150 commuter; \$225 private room w/bath, \$150 shared room w/bath

After losing her son to suicide, Marianne Gouvela's immense grief led her on a quest to reconnect with God, and now she wants to help others. Gouvela, who found peace, comfort and support through her experience with Boston-based Emmaus Ministry, is bringing it to the Diocese of Phoenix.

The ministry doesn't provide therapy or function as a support group, although that naturally happens.

"It's very different," said founding member Diane Monaghan. "We focus on the grieving parents' spiritual journey."

And the promise of eternal life.

When Gouvela's son, Eric, took his life in 2016 at the age of 27 after a struggle with addiction, she wanted something more than a counselor or group.

"There are not many spiritual outlets for people who lost a child," she said. "So many people experience a crisis of faith, and it's not common to go in and talk about it in public groups."

The international Emmaus Ministry is a spiritual program designed specifically for grieving parents whose child of any age has died by any cause, no matter how long ago.

The program name is in reference to a passage from the Gospel of Luke that recounts the story of two of Jesus' disciples, who had left Jerusalem on the day of the Lord's Resurrection, to return to their home village of Emmaus when they encountered a "stranger."

"This ministry is based in Catholic tradition and gives people the opportunity to find their footing again in their relationship with God," Gouvela said. "I lost my

son and through this ministry I could reconnect with God, strengthen myself spiritually and begin to heal.”

Since its inception in 2008, the Catholic-based grief program focused on the tenets of the Catholic Church and spread to several U.S. dioceses, Canada and Ireland.

More than 500 people from 20 different states have attended a retreat, co-founded by Monaghan’s husband Charley and the Franciscan Friars of St. Anthony’s Shrine.

The parent-led ministry is open to any grieving parent regardless of religious affiliation, and future plans in the Phoenix Diocese include meetings at parishes throughout the Valley.

Dr. Anne Vargas-Leveriza, director of the Office of Youth and Child Protection, said her office will be a resource to the ministry which is answering “a need in our community.”

“Working in the mental health field in the past I knew of nothing like this,” Vargas-Leveriza said. “The death of a child is not the norm and when a child leaves the parent first that’s very hard.”

Another Emmaus retreat is planned in April at the Franciscan Renewal Center.