

# THE EVANGELIST

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF ALBANY

PERSPECTIVE

## When there are no words

### *Diocese to offer help for grieving parents*

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*Thursday, August 9, 2018 9:00 AM*

I waited to hear the good news: a firstborn child for a couple who had married a year earlier. I knew she had gone into labor and was at the hospital, and I hoped for a call from her husband sometime during the day or evening.

I received the call — but not from her husband. Her mother said she'd had a baby girl, but there were major complications during the birth and the baby would need to be medevac'd to a children's hospital two hours away.

The new mother held her baby, wrapped in a blanket, before she was taken away. It would be the only time she would see the child alive. Soon afterward, she was told her baby had died.

I went to the hospital to be with her as she raged against God and the world: "How can this be happening?" The tears wouldn't stop. She was devastated, her husband standing beside her bed in disbelief, unable to comfort his distraught wife and mother of their now-dead daughter and unable to process his own feelings.

They buried their daughter in the family plot. Their feelings were buried with her. It was just too painful to talk about. Their marriage barely survived over the ensuing years. It affected their faith in God.

This is only one story of the deep and painful sadness and loss that many parents experience when they experience the death of a child. The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving

Parents was created in the Archdiocese of Boston by Diane and Charley Monaghan, who lost their son, Paul.

The ministry offers a one-day retreat or a weekend retreat for grieving parents. On its website, the organizers say: "Of all the pains that life can hand us, arguably the most searing is the loss of a child. A parent's world irrevocably and horrifically changes forever, no matter what the circumstances or the age of the child.

"In what seems to be a manner contrary to the natural order, parents not only have a physical and emotional part of themselves ripped away, but also have the loss of all of the hopes, dreams and aspirations they had so completely invested in their child.

"With this loss, a parent's world radically and dramatically changes forever. Friends, relatives and acquaintances do not know how to approach or console for fear of offending or upsetting the parent. Many feel that they are treated as if they have a contagious disease.

"In an attempt to seem normal, or 'over it,' emotions are suppressed and the parent begins to withdraw or become distant. This reaction, however, compounds the feeling of being totally alone in this experience."

The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents serves the spiritual needs of grieving parents whose children of any age have died from any cause, and helps interested parents — as well as clergy, religious, diocesan staff and spiritual directors — bring this ministry to their own parishes or regions.

The Albany diocesan Office of Pastoral Care Ministry reached out to the Monaghans in 2017 about starting this ministry in the Diocese. As a result, the Diocese will offer a "come and see" meeting with them Sept. 11 at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Albany. Parish leaders, deacons, religious, grieving parents and companions, spiritual directors and bereavement ministers are invited.

In addition, the Diocese will offer its first Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents one-day retreat Nov. 17 at St. Kateri Tekakwitha parish in Schenectady.

Parishes across the Diocese are donating prayer shawls for the participants of this first retreat. It is open to all parents who have experienced the death of a child of any age, by any cause, no matter how long ago.