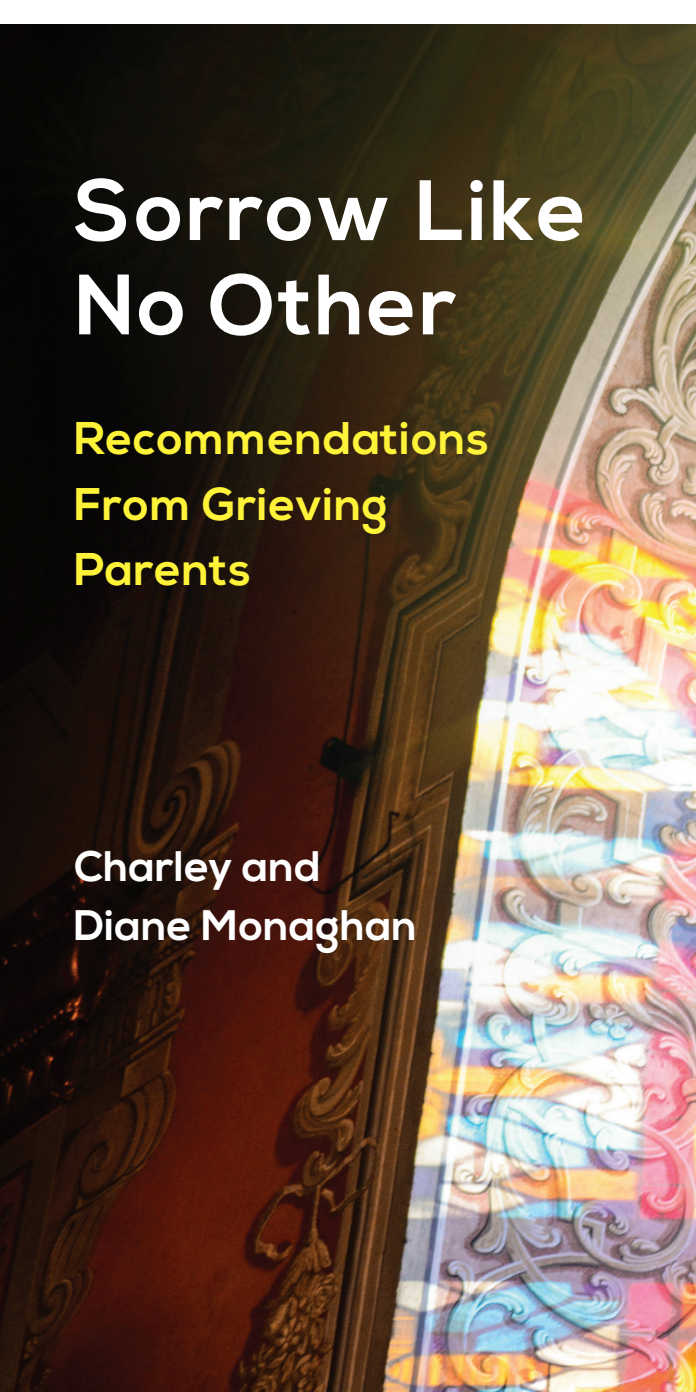


# Sorrow Like No Other

Recommendations  
From Grieving  
Parents

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## INTRODUCTION

The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents has been serving the spiritual needs of parents whose children of have age have died by any cause, no matter how long ago, since 2009.

Through half-hour, one-hour, one-day, and weekend spiritual retreats, parents give themselves the gift of getting away from everyday life for a short time to focus on where God is in their lives—and where their children are right now. For many, this is the first time that they have the opportunity to focus on their individual spiritual journeys.

These pastoral Emmaus retreats are offered by teams comprised of diocesan and parish coordinators and spiritual leaders, as well as grieving parents. Primarily, the ministry is offered *for* grieving parents *by* grieving parents.

The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents supports all Catholic dioceses interested in adopting this

ministry by mentoring and traveling to your location to help lead your first in-person retreat(s) at NO cost to you or your diocese or parishes. We give thanks to our many dedicated donors and grant awards for the ability to do this.

For more information on Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parent programs or how to adopt this ministry, see [www.emfgp.org](http://www.emfgp.org) or call 800-919-9332.



After almost every retreat, we ask parents for comments. The following is feedback we received recently in response to two questions:

1. *What is one thing you want others to know about you as a grieving parent? and*
2. *What is one recommendation you have for people who want to minister to you, as a grieving parent?*

## WHAT IS ONE THING YOU NEED OTHERS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU AS A GRIEVING PARENT?

- Life as a grieving parent is a chronic life-long condition. Sometimes it flares up; sometimes it totally recedes; sometimes it is a dull throb. It is part of who we are and always will be until the day we die and are reunited with our children.
- We may look OK because we are working very hard at it, but we will never be ok until we are reunited with our children. There is a “before” and an “after” for all parents after a child has died. There is no such thing as closure or an end to our grieving

on this earth. A parents' life dramatically changes forever and will never be the same again.

- I have been forever changed by this experience. I may relate to you differently. There are days I may push you away and days I may need you. I may seem indifferent to the things that bother you because I understand what truly matters. I may seek out different friends who have had the same experience for comfort, rather than you. It doesn't mean that I don't care about you but that I am in a different place right now.

It may take years for me to feel that I can re-enter your life in the same way that I did before. I need

you to hear and understand this and be a friend to the new me. It's also ok to mention my child. It makes me feel that you remember her. It doesn't make me feel badly. It makes me feel that you care about me. And know that even as years pass, there are certain dates that will still be difficult for me...the date of her passing; her birthday, Mother's Day and Father's Day, holidays. Reach out to me on those days and tell me that you remember her and me. It will bring me comfort.

- We need you to acknowledge my child and my parenthood:
  - I will always be a mother. I will always be a father. We have co-created an eternal being who will live forever. Consequently, we are parents forever, no matter where our children are.

- Say his/her name in the present tense because he is still alive; do not change the subject or be embarrassed; or worst, walk away.
- Ask me about my child. Don't let him/her be forgotten.
- Don't pretend that my child never existed. Don't avoid talking about him because you are afraid of my tears or causing me pain. Not talking about him causes me more pain. Talking about my child does not add to my pain, even if I cry when we do so.
- To be afraid of wishing me a Happy Mother's Day is to ignore him—and to ignore me as a Mom
- Acknowledge that I will be a parent forever.
- Don't let my child be forgotten; help me to remember him.



- We need you to acknowledge our Memories
  - Memories can beat me up or bless me, depending on the day and time. They are part of who I am.
  - Ask about my favorite memory. Tell a memory of yours. I love this more than anything.
- For us, there is nothing worse than losing a child, so please don't try to compare it to anything else. This is why we really cannot relate to general bereavement programs ministering to any loss. This particular loss is so very different, so we really need to be with other grieving parents who understand our pain.

## WHAT IS ONE RECOMMENDATION YOU HAVE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO MINISTER TO YOU, AS A GRIEVING PARENT?

- Please stop saying
  - Time heals all wounds. (No, it doesn't)
  - You will get over it. (No, I will never get over it until I am reunited with my child. I will get through it, but I will never get over it.)
  - Time to move on. (I can't move on. I will move through.)
  - He's in a better place. (His place is here with me.)
  - You can always have more children. (No one. NO one will ever take the place of my deceased child.)
  - At least you had him for xx years. (What year would

you say it is ok to lose your child?)

- You are so strong. (I am just putting one step in front of the other every day. On most days, I am faking it.)
- I don't know how you do it (I have no choice)
- This was meant to be (No, it wasn't. God did not cause my child to die.)
- Please stop offering solutions. There aren't any.
- Tell us about heaven and what it will be like.
- LISTEN. Don't try to solve the problem or make it go away.
- Be there.
- Pray for me and my family.
- Accept and validate what I am feeling in the moment, even if it seems irrational or crazy to you.

- Acknowledge my horrific pain and cross to bear. Offer to help me walk with this cross.
- Give me permission to find moments of joy. Joy in the memories of my child and joy in the world and life around me.
- Don't be afraid to say her name!
- LISTEN. Don't judge my grief.
- LISTEN. We have no new stories to share. Let us repeat our stories over and over again. Know that we are not living in the past, just trying to share the essence of our child with you.
- Let us talk about our children and our journey.

- Don't judge us when we talk about "signs" from our children. They are real.
- Help us to lean into our grief. Really lean. Help us go through it. We can never go around it.
- Remind us that bad things happen to good people. It is NOT our fault.
- Help us to know that, when we are ready, we can channel our grief into something good.
- Give us a safe, faith-based place to mourn our children together as grieving parents. Give us hope, which is what we need more than anything else.

The Emmaus Ministry offers grieving parents what they need most: HOPE. Hope eventually comes by focusing on the rich teachings of the Catholic Church: Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ gave us the promise of eternal life. Our children are eternal beings who will live forever. Life for them has *changed*, not ended. They are still alive! Someday we will all be together again. We should pray *to* them, as well as *for* them. As grieving parents, we need to hear this message over and over again.

Through spiritual retreats, the Emmaus Ministry offers grieving parents the spiritual nourishment that sustains them and helps them get out of bed in the morning. Currently, we are working with dioceses all over the United States who are adopting the Emmaus Ministry to bring this Hope to grieving parents on an ongoing basis.

If you are interested in learning more about how to adopt this powerful ministry in your diocese on an ongoing basis, call 800-919-9332 or email [info@emfgp.org](mailto:info@emfgp.org).



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