



**CATHOLIC CEMETERIES
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
ONE-DAY RETREAT
DECEMBER 7, 2024**

**FAST FALLS THE EVENTIDE
Retreat Highlights**



It was beautiful, cool, crisp day as we made our way through the winding roads of Darien and the mansion-turned-convent of St. Birgitta's. This day the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport was offering its fourth Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents (EMFGP) spiritual retreat. This retreat was so popular that it filled to capacity a month before its scheduled date of December 7. The team was eager to begin.

We welcomed 26 parents: 16 mothers and 10 fathers (an unusually large number of fathers). All but two parents were from CT. We honored 25 children: 16 sons and 9 daughters. Age ranged from three days to 67 years old at the time of death. Time since the death ranged from nine weeks to 43 years ago. Cause of death included illness (11); accident (9); overdose (4); and suicide (1).

Retreat Team members included Dean Gestal, Host; Rev David Marcotte, Spiritual Leader, Confessor, and Mass Celebrant; Marypat Hughes, Registration Coordinator and Facilitator; Carolyn Killian and Nancy

Bentley, Retreat Coordination and Support; Kenn Devane, technical support; Sue DiSisto and Diane Monaghan, Retreat Leaders; and members of the Diocese of Bridgeport Prayer Shawl Ministries.

As they began to filter in, there was uneasiness in the air. Several parents shared that they were nervous about coming and unsure of what to expect. After introductions and welcoming remarks, we entered St Birgitta's stunning chapel, greeted by beautiful Memorial Candles showing photos of our children. We prayed... *Loving Spirit of Wisdom, may I see what is important for me to remember, What is important for me to hold to my heart, and what I need to simply let go of in peace.* And we sang, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; I want to see you."



After a short break, we met in the sun-soaked atrium overlooking a beautiful Long Island Sound inlet. Fr. Marcotte, who stayed with us the entire day, gave a very comforting reflection. As you deal with your grief, he said, it's like trying to shove a beach ball to the bottom of a pool. No matter how hard you try, it keeps pushing back to the surface with a defiance you can't control. As you walk through your grief, slowly the ball deflates, the air seeps out, and the ball ends up on the floor of the pool. It's always there and you know it, but it is no longer constantly pushes through to the surface.



How do you work on your grief and deflate the ball? By listening to your grief, said Fr. Marcotte. Read *Winter of the Heart* by Paula D'Arcy, he said. Pause, move slowly, and recharge yourself. The shattered heart needs stillness and peace.

The haunting question of grief, said Fr. Marcotte, is why did a loving God allow this horrific situation to happen? There are no answers, he said. There is randomness to the universe, but God walks with us through good times and bad. God yearns to be with us when tragedy strikes. He yearns to walk with us, to grieve with us. Take refuge in God and in one another, urged Fr. Marcotte

At this point, Fr. Marcotte shared some interesting insights from Scripture, John O'Donohue, Paula D'Arcy, Mary Oliver, Pema Chodron, Jisan Tova Green

He ended with a beautiful poem from John O'Donohue, **For a Parent on the Death of a Child:**

Let the silent tears flow
And when your eyes clear
Perhaps you will glimpse
How your eternal child
Has become the unseen angel
Who parents your heart
And persuades the moon
To send new gifts ashore.

After a delicious lunch and home-made cream puffs prepared and served by the sisters, we re-grouped in the atrium to hear the Parent Witness of EMFGP co-founder, Diane Monaghan. After the death of their beautiful son, Paul, by suicide in 2002, Diane and her husband, Charley, searched for meaning, peace, and comfort. After many years, they finally found it in the tenets of the Catholic Church... *Life has changed, not ended. Someday we will be together again. We don't have to wait until we die to have a relationship.* She came to the conclusion that "You, my son, have shown me God." Consequently, EMFGP was born.



Afternoon sessions included small groups of mothers and fathers, letter writing, and an Emmaus Walk with partners chosen by the Holy Spirit. Parents talked about finding God in their pain. Feeling blessed to have children, even though now they are gone from this world. Going *through*, not around, grief—and how to do this. The intense comfort of sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament in adoration—even if only for five minutes. Parents mentioned that 24-hour adoration is available

online at www.savior.org, and that Spiritual Direction is available at Fairfield University via Zoom. For more information, call 203-524-4000.

There was a vibrant discussion about the Mass, with several parents saying they can't go because of being angry with God and hearing the broken promises of Scripture. Other parents said they can't stay away because this is where they feel closest to God and their children.

As daylight began to fade, one parent made a poignant observation that when we first began this morning, we could see through all of atrium windows that it was low tide. Now that we are almost finished, it's high tide. This reminds me, he said, of a passage from the King James Bible: Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide. It's also a song with the lyrics:

Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.



Fr. Marcotte celebrated a beautiful Vigil Mass. In his homily, he talked about Mary being our refuge in the storm. Even though we don't understand what is happening, he said, Mary and Jesus will always be our safe harbor. He urged us to pray for the grace to welcome them into our hearts.

After Mass each parent received a handmade hug prayer shawl, beautifully and prayerfully knit by members of various parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Throughout the day the presence of the Holy Spirit and the children—was palpable. The transformation of many parents from the beginning of the day to the end was amazing. Through her tears, one mother said, *"I felt like I just spent the day with my daughter."* Another said, *"Thank you for the wonderful, peace-filled day."*

The retreat concluded with a moving Closing Prayer Service during which we prayed, *"God of mercy, heal us and grant us your peace."* And we sang, *"Go in peace, God be with you; Go in peace, be at rest; with the saints and the angels, now you are free; Go in peace."*

We thank the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport for their love and compassion for grieving parents—and for adopting EMFGP and offering these beautiful, grace-filled retreats. We deeply appreciate their support of EMFGP and their interest in spearheading the next chapter of the ministry. If you would like to participate in our ["RE-IMAGINING EMFGP"](#) project, please join us!