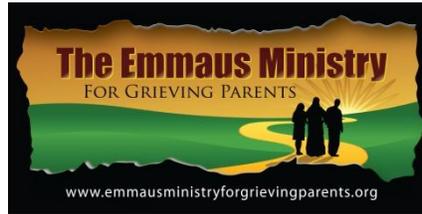




St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center



July 25, 2015 Emmaus Ministry One-Day Retreat St. Anthony Shrine Friary Highlights

It was an unusually pleasant day in July when 24 parents gathered on the 5th floor living area of St. Anthony Shrine's Friary. This retreat marked a "first" in that we had to close registrations a week early because we were filled to capacity. Seeking peace and comfort and not knowing what to expect, many parents entered with trepidation.



Retreat team members included the following:

Fr. Eric Carpine OFM, Bro. John Maganzini OFM, Peggy Hassett, Fr. Tom Conway OFM, Fr. John Hogan OFM, Kevin Kielely and the kitchen staff, Debbie Hawes and the facilities staff, Mary Emery, Lois Diamond, Barbara Murray, Beth Rapoza, and all donors and benefactors of The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents.

Fr. John, Friary Guardian, immediately put parents at ease with his gracious welcome. As he did in March, Fr. John encouraged us to enjoy the Friary, while focusing on our individual spiritual journeys. He encouraged us to spend some time during the day pondering the questions, "*Who are you, God?*" "*And who am I?*"

Fr. Tom, Executive Director of the Shrine, also welcomed parents and reiterated how important the Emmaus Ministry is to the mission of the Shrine.

We then entered the friars' beautiful, private chapel, where there were candles with photos of our children positioned next to the altar and the Paschal Candle. Bro. John opened the Morning Prayer Service with a moving explanation of the symbolism of candles in the Christian tradition.

The Paschal Candle, he said, symbolizes the presence of Jesus. "*I am the way, the truth, and the light.*" "*I am the light of the world.*" Through baptism, said Bro. John, our children received the light of Christ. This light conquered death, so the light of our children can



never be extinguished. Their light continues today in love and is symbolized by the beautiful candles in front of us.

Then we prayed...

The Candle Prayer

Lord, this candle that I have lit,
May it be a LIGHT from You
To lighten my way
Through difficulties and decisions.

May it be FIRE from You to burn
Up my selfishness, my pride,
And all that is impure in me.

May it be FLAME from You
To warm my heart and
Teach me to love.

Lord, I cannot stay long in Your house.
This candle is a little bit
Of myself that I offer to You.
Help me to continue my prayer
In all that I do this day.

(From a prayer used in the Cathedral of Tours)

In a very emotional ritual, each of us lit the candle bearing our child's name and photo. In the spirit of Pentecost, said Fr. Eric, when the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered in the room, we also light a special Remembrance Candle in loving memory of the children and loved ones of benefactors who support The Emmaus Ministry through their generous financial donations. All candles remained lit throughout the entire day.

As part of the Opening Prayer Service, Bro. John said that the ministry has adopted "The Emmaus Song" by Monica Brown as its signature thematic song. So appropriate, the lyrics of "The Emmaus Song" illustrate our thoughts in prayer as we begin each retreat....



The Emmaus Song

Monica Brown

Come Journey with us
Walk with us
Listen to our story
Our hopes, our dreams, our struggles, our joys,
Our story of life
We share with you as we journey,
Jesus, our God.

May our hearts be warmed and strengthened by your presence here
In your holy word and bread of life in the love we share,
May we go forth on our journey with you.

Come journey with us
Talk with us
Tell us of your story
Open our minds to understand the mystery of your life with us
Your risen life,
Jesus, our God

May our hearts be warmed and strengthened by your presence here
In your holy word and bread of life in the love we share,
May we go forth on our journey with you.

Come journey with us
Stay with us
Make us one with you
In the blessing of the bread
The breaking of bread
May we truly know your life in us
Your love for us,
Jesus, our God.

May our hearts be warmed and strengthened by your presence here
In your holy word and bread of life in the love we share,
May we go forth on our journey with you.

May our hearts be warmed and strengthened by your presence here
In your holy word and bread of life in the love we share,
May we go forth on our journey with you.

We then relaxed in the very comfortable friary living room where Fr. Eric gave a unique reflection on “Finding Consolation through Music” There are many types of prayer, said Fr. Eric. Music is one of them. Sometimes you don’t even need words to pray. Sometimes, particularly when we are broken, we pray just by “being.” Some people cry in church. It is ok to cry in church...crying is prayer, said Fr. Eric.

Fr. Eric then shared some songs that moved him deeply including “[Celebrate Me Home](#),” by Ruben Studdard; “Child of my Heart” by Sara Hart; “[Infinite Grace](#)” by Sarah Hart, and “[I Can Only Imagine](#)” by Mercy Me.

Fr. Eric said that he is particularly moved by “I Can Only Imagine” and that he has requested that it be played at his funeral. If music helps you to connect with God, that is a good thing, said Fr. Eric.



A few weeks before the retreat, we invited registered parents to send us copies of songs and lyrics that they found to be particularly comforting in their grief journey. After Fr. Eric’s reflection and throughout the rest of the day, we were able to listen to these songs and find solace in their lyrics. A CD including this playlist is available to anyone who would like a copy. Please email me (diane@emfgp.org) and I will send it to you.

After a short break, Charley Monaghan, shared highlights of his continuing spiritual journey after the death of his only son, Paul.

Charley talked about a transformational “sign” that convinced him of the very real presence of Paul—and how it changed his doubts and dispelled his disbeliefs.

After lunch, we broke into small groups of mothers and fathers, focusing on the questions, “*What brings you consolation in your grieving process right now?*” Animated discussions had answers ranging from “*Nothing... I am very angry right now with a God who could let this happen.*” to “*My faith... the promise of eternal life... being with people who ‘get it.’*”

Those who wished to do so were then invited to find a quiet place and write a prayer, letter, or psalm to God or to our children. These letters were later burned and their ashes mixed with incense used later in the day at Mass. Our “prayers like incense” rose upward.

Invoking the Holy Spirit to choose who would walk with whom, we then started our Emmaus walks. Just as Jesus joined his grief stricken disciples on the road to Emmaus, we believe he joined us as we companioned each other today.

Parents then had the option of listening to the “Music of Consolation” CD, reconciliation, spiritual direction, or quiet reflection.

Fr. Eric celebrated a beautiful Mass incensing the altar and our candles with prayer. His homily, based on the gospel of five loaves and two fish, was thought provoking and comforting. Sometimes the emptiness we all feel can be transformed into abundance... and the brokenness of our lives can be transformational for others, he said. Each child—and the children and loved ones of donors—were remembered by name during Intercessions at the Mass.



After a delicious Italian dinner, we gathered back in the chapel for the always-moving Closing Prayer Service. We were given the Sacrament of Anointing to help us heal. Traditionally in the Church, this sacrament was reserved only for the dying (Extreme Unction). Today, in the Franciscan tradition of “all are welcome,” it can also be given to anyone in need of healing—emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, as well as physically. Obviously we are all in need, so it was very consoling to receive this sacrament.



As we were gathered around the candles and the altar, the many friars who joined us for the Closing Prayer Service then came to each of us for the “laying on of hands,” a way of literally holding someone in prayer. It was amazing to close your eyes and feel the very different touch of each friar as he prayed over you—and to physically feel the power and energy of that touch flow through you. For many of us, it brought much healing and strength.

After a beautiful, robust rendition of “Salve Regina” by the friars, another Emmaus Ministry retreat ended.

As members of the retreat team, we never really know how the Holy Spirit works at our retreats. We just pray to Him to keep us out of His way.

The ministry is not a support group. We are not trained psychotherapists or even facilitators. Our mission is to provide parents with the opportunity to give themselves the gift of getting away from everyday life to focus on their spiritual journeys. We hope that the parents who were called to this retreat were able to do that, while finding peace and comfort, at least for a time.

A few comments from those who were there seemed to indicate as much...

“In the 10 months since my son died, I have never felt peace until I came here.”

“I found this retreat most highly spiritual; it gave me great peace and comfort.”

“It was a beautiful experience... very emotional, but very rewarding.”

“Even though we have attended quite a few retreats, each one is always so meaningful, comforting, and uplifting.”

“The day was relaxing, no pressure, and structured in such a way that we felt comfortable being there.”

“This ministry has been transformational for me.”

Upcoming retreats include the following programs:

October 3, 2015:	One-Day Retreat, Stoneham, MA
October 24, 2015:	One-Day Retreat, Hartford, CT
November 6-8, 2015:	Weekend Retreat, Duxbury, MA
November 21, 2015:	One-Day Retreat, Tiverton, RI
January 16, 2016:	One-Day Retreat, Lowell, MA

Please pass along this information to anyone you think might be interested and, as always, please keep us in your prayers.

