

## Saint Patrick Roman Catholic Parish



### ***I'D LIKE TO REWRITE HIS OBITUARY***

*Based on what I know now—and believe—about the promise of eternal life, I would change, “He WAS the son of...” to “He IS the son of...”*

*--Grieving Mom at St. Patrick's 2016 One-Day Retreat*

The drive to Stoneham very early Saturday morning was in sharp contrast to last year's raw and dreary ride. This day it was a picture-perfect, deep-blue sky, crisp fall New England day... an indication of what was to come.

We welcomed 17 grieving parents from Stoneham, Reading, Marshfield, Wakefield, Upton, Medford, Waltham, and Randolph. Age of children when they were born into eternal life ranged from 21 years to 45 years. Time since the death of the child ranged from 1 year to 19 years. Cause of death included illness, drug overdose, suicide, and murder.

Members of the Retreat Team included Fr. Jürgen Lias, Pastor of St. Gregory the Great Ordinariate; Patrice Fitzpatrick, St. Patrick Pastoral Associate; Susan Compton, St. Patrick Music Ministry; St. Patrick Prayer Vigil Group; St. Patrick Prayer Shawl Group; Beth Rapoza; Brian Fitzpatrick; and Emmaus Parent Companions Marlene and Bob Doran, Jean and Tony Giurleo, Sandra Riggillo, and Charley and Diane Monaghan; The Barile Family Funeral Homes of Stoneham and Reading; and other St. Patrick Parish volunteers.



After a very moving Opening Prayer Service during which Patrice shared the symbolism of light as Christ and eternal life and parents lit Memorial Candles for their children, Fr. Jürgen Lias gave a very powerful reflection.



Particularly comforting were Fr. Jürgen's unequivocal statements that our children are definitely at peace in the Lord; we should pray *to* them, not necessarily always *for* them; that they are absolutely part of the Communion of Saints; and that we will, without any doubt, see them again.

“We will always have this hole in our heart,” said Fr. Jürgen, “God doesn't fill it.

It will never be filled on this earth. It can't be.” he said. “But one day it will, undeniably, be filled—when we are rejoined with our children in heaven. Our child's earthly life is really only the first page to a very long book,” he said.

To experience Fr. Jürgen's words of comfort first hand, see his talk on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNW0pMLxJds>

### **INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS BY PARENTS DURING THE RETREAT:**

- After our son died, we had so many people visit us, send us gifts, express their condolences, bring casseroles... that at one point, I felt that if one more person came to me, I would shout at them, “Shut up! Go Away! I don't want you! I just want my son back!” Of course, I didn't say this. I just wanted to be left alone.
- After the death of our son, well-meaning friends tried to fix our “problem.”
- When my husband and I finally realized we were grieving in completely different and separate ways—and decided to get outside help individually — it was a good thing.



- After my son died, I worried about everyone else and how they were coping. It was only when someone said to me, “This is one time in your life when you need to focus on yourself” that I actually did.

- The key is moving on while keeping the spirit of your child alive.

- How do we keep his spirit alive? By seeing him in the beauty of butterflies that our grandchildren believe are visits from him; by honoring him with a memorial Angel of Hope; by visiting the tomb of St. Anthony in Padua and placing his picture at the

foot of the saint's grave; by holding a Celebration of Life party in our

backyard; by planting a tree; by walking in walks and raising money for Alzheimer patients.

- As fathers, we really want to be John Wayne—protectors at all cost. Having our children die means that we have failed in our most basic duty and calling. We didn't do our job. Having other men—and being able to share our innermost thoughts with them—makes it easier to open up.
- When our child died, we were “dope slapped.” Until that time, we really didn't need—or truly believe—in God.
- When his sister got pregnant, I put my (deceased) son to work.
- Death forces us to ask the big questions: “What is the meaning of life? What are we here for?”
- Our Christian faith offers the answer to these questions: Death is NOT the final answer. We need to keep our eye on the final prize: a new heaven and a new earth where there is no sadness, sorrow, or death... just Life Everlasting.

### QUOTABLE QUOTES DURING THE RETREAT:

- “I don't look back anymore. I look to the future. Today I am 5½ years closer to seeing my precious child again—rather than saying it has been 5½ years since he's been gone.”
- “I am not stuck in my grief. I am in cement!”
- “Faith is a battle. We live in a fallen world. The devil definitely exists as a force opposed to God. He is a liar and a murderer. We live in a spiritual war zone.”
- “There is no harder challenge than the death of a child. Faith alone will get us through this.”

At the end of the Mass, Fr. Jurgen offered this prayer from John Henry Newman:  
*May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.*

After Mass, we combined the ashes of the letters we had written earlier and burned with incense. Then we went outside and processed the entire perimeter of St. Patrick's to each of three grottos singing the Processional Chant, “O Lord, Hear My Prayer.”



We had a delicious dinner and a very moving Closing Prayer Service during which we extinguished the wick of our children's candles—but never the Light of the eternal life that we had such a significant part in creating.

And, very soon thereafter, our second Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents Retreat at St. Patrick's Parish in Stoneham ended—with hopes and plans for the future retreats already in progress.

