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## Emmaus Ministry Retreats for Grieving Parents

### Offered in Archdiocese

By **DAN PIETRAFESA**

Marypat Hughes believes that the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents can spiritually help parents cope with the pain of losing a child.

The Ossining woman led a spirited effort to bring the Catholic ministry to the archdiocese for three one-day Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents retreats at St. Joseph's Seminary on Saturdays, Feb. 11 and 25, and the Church of the Magdalene in Pocantico Hills on Saturday, April 1.

"This will be meaningful for a lot of people on their journey," said Ms. Hughes, who attended a retreat five months ago after her 29-year-old son Thomas James died in 2015.

"The prayer network that you engage in during the retreat stays with you. It's very powerful."

The three one-day retreats are serving as pilots for the program in the archdiocese with the goal to have the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents available at parishes throughout the archdiocese.

The 10-hour pilot retreats will include group talks, the sacrament of reconciliation, Mass, prayer services and letter writing to God, child or another person.

The retreats open with a candle-lighting ceremony. Each candle has the child's name and picture and stands as a symbol of constant prayer.

"We hope to have people come and get a few seeds out there to bring into their own parish. It's the kind of ministry they found parishes rally around," said Sue DiSisto, coordinator for parenting and family life in the archdiocese.

“I received a number of contact references and called around. Every comment heard was all extremely positive. It’s something very special for a group of people who are often having a hard time.”

Diane and Charley Monaghan, founders of the Emmaus Ministry, are scheduled to participate in the three New York retreats. The Monaghans, whose son Paul took his life on Thanksgiving Day in 2002, started Emmaus in Boston in 2009 with a mission to serve the spiritual needs of grieving parents whose children died at any age of any cause and to assist those interested in bringing this ministry to their parish or region. One-hour and one-day retreats are now held throughout the Northeast.

“You’re part of a club no one wants to be a part of,” Ms. DiSisto said. “Mothers and fathers grieve differently. This ministry is not a support or therapy group. It’s a spiritual journey.

“You really have a whole gamut of individuals coming to this to find healing spiritually in their walk and journey. A person can engage as much or as little as they want. Many people go to more than one of these retreats.”

Ms. Hughes’ son Thomas James, a Northwestern University graduate, was a successful investment banker for Moelis & Co. in Manhattan who turned to cocaine to cope with his professional demands. On May 28, 2015, Thomas fell to his death from his 24<sup>th</sup>-floor apartment in Manhattan. Signs of drinking and cocaine use were found in the apartment, police reported.

Ms. Hughes said attending bereavement group meetings at church were initially helpful. Feeling she needed more, she attended the Emmaus Ministry retreat in Boston in August.

She returned from the retreat and wrote a letter to Cardinal Dolan, hoping he’d bring this ministry to the archdiocese. The cardinal welcomed the idea and the archdiocesan Family Life/Respect Life is organizing the retreats.

“After this happens to you as a parent, you don’t know where to turn,” Ms. Hughes said. “When you’re in a room with other people who have been through this, you understand the glance from another person and where they’re coming from.”

Information: [www.emfgp.org/archny](http://www.emfgp.org/archny) or call (646) 794-3191.