



St. Anthony Shrine's Emmaus Ministry helps grieving parents go on

'I felt like a load had been lifted'

Marie Szaniszlo Wednesday, October 19, 2016



Credit: Matt Stone

Boston Herald (MA)

Volume 34, Issue 293

October 19, 2016

VIDEO ON YOUTUBE AT <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i470dpE6f7E>

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She still has all of his clothes. She doesn't want to wash them. Their scent reminds her of him.

Photos of Barbara Favuzzi's son are everywhere in the Scituate home she shares with her husband, Rocco, and their son's dog, Axel. On the living room mantel is one of Dan at 17 in a blue shirt and beige tie, his dark hair peeking out behind his collar. And another of him at 26, his hair short and tinged with grey.

Upstairs, they keep the seven-string acoustic guitar they were going to give him as a birthday present before he killed himself on June 2, 2014, after a long struggle with drugs, alcohol, anxiety and depression. He was 27.

"From my perspective, that was the ultimate failure as a parent — everything you should have done, shouldn't have done," she said, her voice trailing off as she sits at the dining table.

After Dan died, his AA sponsor — one of the friars at St. Anthony Shrine in Boston — put her in touch with its Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents, and in October 2014, the Favuzzis went on their first Emmaus retreat.

"The Emmaus Ministry helped save me," Barbara Favuzzi said. "It helped me realize there are some things that are out of your control. Forgive yourself. God gave you this child for however many years, and you did the best you could. Do the things your child would have wanted you to do. And one day, you'll be together again."

One of more than two dozen outreach programs at St. Anthony Shrine in Boston, the Emmaus Ministry offers parent-to-parent companionship, retreats, and monthly Scripture readings and coffee socials for parents whose children of any age have died by any cause.

Although the ministry focuses on the spiritual needs of grieving parents, for the Favuzzis, it also has had many of the benefits of a support group. They've developed friendships with other parents, swapped recipes and checked in with one another regularly, especially on their children's birthdays.

On that first retreat, the Favuzzis were asked to write a letter to the child they had lost.

"I asked Dan to forgive me," Barbara Favuzzi said, and she begins to cry. "As much as he and I talked, I couldn't understand the depth of his pain."

A nun at the retreat talked about prayer — to, not just for, their children — as a powerful conduit to peace. The group talked about Christ's mother, Mary, who lost her own child when he was crucified, and about using her as a source of strength "because she would understand your pain better than anyone," Barbara Favuzzi said.

"We talked about the spirit of your child still being with you, but in a different place, a place where eventually you'll be together again," she said. "By the next day, I felt like a load had been lifted off my shoulders."

Rocco Favuzzi remembers initially finding that first retreat daunting.

"I probably wouldn't have gone if it weren't for my wife," he said.

"When your child dies, you really don't know what to do or where to turn. You build up a lot of hurt and guilt. But the (retreat's) a place where you can release some of it without being put under any pressure to talk. You hear other people tell their stories, and you realize there are people there who've had similar experiences. Knowing that helps in its own way. It helps you not get over your loss, but get through it."

Coming tomorrow: Unclaimed by any next of kin, the remains of three people who would otherwise have been buried in pauper's graves are given funerals and burials with dignity and compassion by St. Anthony Shrine.

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Caption:

PROGRAM 'HELPED SAVE ME': Barbara and Rocco Favuzzi, above, look at a picture of their son, Dan, who killed himself in June 2014 at the age of 27. They found solace through the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents at St. Anthony Shrine in Boston. Dan Favuzzi is seen at as a child in a photo at right.

STAFF PHOTOS BY MATT STONE

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Record Number: 31956403