

St. Clement's Parish Saratoga Springs, NY



One-Day Retreat April 27, 2019

IT TAKES A PARISH

It was a very cold, raw, and dark day on April 27 in Saratoga Springs, but at St. Clement's Parish Center, it felt like the sun was shining brightly inside a warm cocoon far away from the outside world.

According to Rachel Roy, “*Compassion is the truest form of love.*” As manifestation of this, many members and ministries of St. Clement's Parish, as well as the Saratoga Springs' community came together to make this day particularly meaningful and special.



Together they created a beautiful, grace-filled day for the 20 grieving parents who participated in the Diocese of Albany's second Emmaus Ministry Retreat for parents whose children of any age have died by any cause, no matter how long ago. The first diocesan Emmaus Ministry retreat was held last November at St. Kateri Parish in Schenectady.

St. Clement & Corpus Christi Retreat Team Members who coordinated and participated in the retreat included....

Fr. Ed Faliske, C.Ss.R., St. Clement's Pastor; Harley McDevitt, Diocesan Director of Pastoral Care; Becky Craig, Pastoral Associate for Pastoral Care; Mary Beth Wing, Bereavement Coordinator; Ruth Pouliot and Fran Fay; Parent Coordinators Stephen & Lynn Bardsley, all from St. Clements and Sharon Ryan, Joan Haviland, Barbara White, and Judy Mullins from Corpus Christi Church and Charley and Diane Monaghan, founders of this ministry.

Members of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Chapter of the Fraternities of St. Dominic sat in vigil with Memorial Candles.

St. Clement's Arimathea Ministry; Legion of Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Praesidium; Catholic Daughters of America, Loughlin Court #422 set up and served snacks, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Corpus Christi Mother Mary Rosary Ministry provided handmade rosaries. St. Clement's and Corpus Christi Prayer Shawl Ministries provided comforting prayer shawls, as did Barbara White.

In addition, it was gratifying to see members and clergy from other parishes, including St. Henry's, St. Mary's and Corpus Christi, who are planning their own retreats, attend this retreat as guests.

Members of the Saratoga Springs community offered extraordinary, compassionate support:

- William J. Burke & Sons Funeral Home, American Italian Club, and John Olenik—much needed cash donations
- Old Bryan Inn—dinner
- Jill Coffin—calligraphy for comfort crosses
- Price Chopper—cups and napkins
- Whistling Tea Kettle—a variety of teas
- Elk Sign Shop—name tags
- Bellmonte Tents—tables for lunch and dinner

All to bring peace, comfort and hope to grieving parents gathered at St. Clement's. Parents whose children have died close to home and more than 2000 miles away... Children who died by murder, suicide, accident, and illness—only a few weeks ago or many years ago... Children whose ages at the time of death ranged from prenatal to 60 years old. The Emmaus Ministry and the Diocese of Albany serve all.



If you are one of these parents—or one of the many others who experience the death of their children every day, where do you turn? How do you find any peace at all? What comfort can your Catholic faith possibly offer?

In coming to an Emmaus Ministry Retreat, parents give themselves the gift of getting away from everyday life to focus on where God is in their lives right now after the death of their children—and where their children are.

They remember and honor their children in prayer services, small and large group gatherings, one-on-one Emmaus walks, letter writing to their children,

Reconciliation, and Mass. They hear reflections from Spiritual Leaders and interact with each other, if they wish.



An Emmaus Ministry retreat is not a workshop, seminar, or support group. Parents are not required to tell their stories or talk at all. Many parents participate by listening. Often, grieving parents come back to retreats over and over again for spiritual nourishment and the comfort of being with others who know their pain.

In the Opening Prayer Service this day, parents lit Memorial Candles depicting pictures of their children and reflected on the meaning of light. Fr. Ed told them that, at Baptism, they gave their children the light of Christ. *“Today, I believe,”* said Fr. Ed, *“they are giving this light back to you.”*

During his reflection, Fr. Ed talked about the meaning of the word, “retreat,” a military term. It is a time, he said, when you get out of the line of fire, find a safe place, search for healing of brokenness, and count your ammunition to assess your strength before going back into the battle. This is what we are here for today, he said.

Fr. Ed also talked about the Road to Emmaus Scripture reading (Luke 24: 13-35) during which two disciples encountered Jesus in the midst of their grief journey when they were so devastated and thought all was lost as they walked toward the sunset to Emmaus. After eventually recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread, they ran back to Jerusalem toward the sunrise exploding with the joy of new life and the Resurrection.

Why do bad things happen to good people? asked Fr. Ed. Only God knows, he said. It is a mystery. Quoting the book of Job, Fr. Ed said that it is through suffering that Job comes to know God. Job tried to do everything right, yet he lost all that he loved. Only when he seeks God and accepts His power, does he find peace. Job used his pain to seek God. Because of this, God eventually heals him. *“Now my eye sees you,”* said Job.

Fr. Ed quoted extensively from “A Grief Unveiled: A Father’s Journey” by Gregory Floyd... Grief is a journey, not a destination. Suffering is evil and a mystery we cannot solve, but we must enter into... God uses our loss to deepen our desire for heaven and ease the suffering of those around us, said Fr. Ed.

We must never see the Crucifixion without the Resurrection, said Fr. Ed, or the Resurrection without the Crucifixion. Because of the death of his son, said Fr. Ed, God is also a bereaved parent.

Today we gather to celebrate Life, said Fr. Ed, not only the earthly life of our children, but also their eternal life. Peace will come, but only through trust in God.

“They are more alive than ever before,” said Fr. Ed “because every frailty is gone and only Love remains.”



We have memories, said Fr. Ed, but not merely memories. Your children are still very much a part of you. They are alive in you. They are alive in God. Nothing will ever change that.

Before coming to an Emmaus Ministry retreat, many parents say they thought it would be a very long and sad day. But after joining together at various sessions, Mass, a delicious dinner, and a moving Closing Prayer Service, many say the day flew by and they weren't really ready to go home!

Fr. Ed said, *“This is a very powerful ministry. Thank you so much for bringing it to us.”* Fr. Tom, pastor of St. Henry’s, said, *“This ministry is thought-provoking and heartfelt.”*

After the retreat, parents said...

- *“I found much support and spiritual growth.”*
- *“Very inspirational.”*
- *“The retreat was very helpful, enlightening. You laugh, cry and remember your faith and loved one.”*
- *“This retreat brought me joy and the strength to keep going and comfort knowing God loves us.”*

The Diocese of Albany, in cooperation with parishes, plans to offer at least two Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents retreats a year. For more information on offering a retreat at your parish, contact Harley at 518-641-6823 or harley.mcdevitt@rcda.org.

For more information on the Emmaus Ministry and locations of other retreats throughout the U.S., see www.emfgp.org.

