

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to be a Catholic to participate in this retreat?

People of any and all faith traditions, and even those who profess no faith, are welcome to attend this retreat. We believe that the Holy Spirit shares his gifts generously with all who ask. Please know, however, that we are faithful to Catholic teaching and incorporate Catholic liturgy in our retreats, and ask all participants to be mindful and respectful of our Catholic faith tradition.

2. I am not especially religious, particularly now. Will I get anything at all out of this retreat?

Yes! While the retreat incorporates various teachings and liturgies of the Catholic Church, no practice or observance of "religion" is absolutely necessary—other than openness to hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as we make our way through this long and difficult journey.

3. Does it matter how or when my child died?

No, it doesn't matter how or when your child died. We have parents whose children have died as the result of illness, accident, suicide, and violence. Children's ages at death range from neonatal to adult. All parents are welcome.

4. How do I know if it is too soon after the death of my child to participate in this retreat?

There is no perfect time when it is good to participate or not participate. We firmly believe that the Holy Spirit guides your participation in the retreat and leads you to us when you are ready. We have welcomed parents whose children had died only one to two months prior to a retreat, as well as those whose children have been gone for more than 30 years. If this is something you feel you would like to try, then the time is right for you.

5. How does this retreat differ from other groups for bereaved parents?

The mission of The Emmaus Journey is to focus on spiritual accompaniment for bereaved parents and the spirituality of the grieving process.

6. Can you tell me more about this retreat?

The focus of this retreat is personal and spiritual.

- It focuses on your spiritual needs, as opposed to the needs of a group.
- It requires no sharing of information or your story, unless you feel totally comfortable doing so with other parents. It is always acceptable to "pass", and some participate by listening only.
- In focusing on the spiritual perspective in dealing with the death of your child, it seeks to help you answer such questions as, "Where is God in all of this?... Where is God in my life right now?... How could God let this happen?... Where do I turn now that God has abandoned me?... Will I ever see my child again?... Where is my child right now?.. How can I ensure that any good comes from all of this horror?..."

- The retreat is supported by a dedicated group of other grieving parents, all of whom have shared the pain and difficulty of the grieving process.

7. Why is the spiritual perspective so important in this retreat?

Because many of us have found that the spiritual perspective is the only way to find peace, comfort, and hope. Many of us have found much healing in focusing on our relationship with God and with our children in the eternal afterlife. It's what sets this group apart from many other groups serving bereaved parents.

8. Who is involved in presenting your retreat?

The retreats are presented by a team of leaders, including grieving parents who have lost a child, and so know something of the pain you feel. They are knowledgeable bereavement companions who use their personal experiences to accompany you in your spiritual journey of processing and dealing with the many feelings that accompany the death of your child. In addition, Catholic priests, deacons, religious, and spiritual directors serve on our retreat teams, both directly and indirectly. All retreat team members hold us and our children in prayer. In addition, they serve on individual retreat teams in various capacities throughout the year.

Many of the Spiritual Leaders who work with us freely admit that they cannot know or experience a grieving parent's pain. They can, however, tremendously assist in our search for some understanding of God's presence in our experience; they can help us to find ways to draw us closer to our absent children; and they can be companions to us on our journey.

9. What actually happens at one of your retreats?

Link to Schedule coming soon

10. Is it ok to come to more than one retreat?

Yes! Just as Mass is needed to constantly nourish the soul, many of our parents come to multiple retreats. We have no restrictions on who can come to what; we encourage your ongoing participation.

11. Who developed The Emmaus Journey?

The Emmaus Journey, developed by the Diocese of Richmond, is based on the work of Charley and Diane Monaghan. They began the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents in loving memory of their son, Paul Patrick Monaghan. Learn more at emfgp.org.