

On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 I attended my first bereavement session at St. Rose in East Hanover. I had lost my son Michael just five months prior on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2017. I entered this room as a shaking crying emotional mess. I knew only one person, in this room of about thirty other folks who were all strangers to me. They were there for the same reason as I, to seek Gods help. The one person I knew in the room was Father Owen who is much much more than a spiritual leader he is truly a calming force in a turbulent world. He navigated my family and me through the worse experience an parent could imagine the loss of our only child.

That very first night each of us, in turn, told our story of loss, we all cried and tried to comfort each other. Father Owen listened and compassionately spoke to each of us. This for me was the very first baby step to a healing process that I now know will take, me at least, a very long time. I didn't know what to expect that first night, but I knew I had to, and wanted to, keep going back. As the weeks went on these strangers became acquaints, soon we no longer need our name tags and before we knew it we had become friends. Under the guidance and teaching of Father Owen, even our tears morphed into smiles. This is not to say that the sadness had been removed, oh no rather we learned how we could smile and even laugh a bit.

The bereavement group was to have its last meeting on March 12<sup>th</sup>, but Father was kind enough to extend it through April 23<sup>rd</sup>, for which we are all grateful. The last meeting consisted of a beautiful private mass for the group followed by a wonderful dinner. This dinner was from the heart with many of the group bringing scrumptious homemade dishes and desserts and pizza.

I've come a long way from the first night back in October, and I know I still have a long way to go. I still cry almost every day but I DON'T cry ALL DAY every day. Had I not been blessed to be part of this group of, now friends, and the wonderful guidance of Father Owen, I know I'd still be a quivering crying mess today. For this I will be forever GREATFUL.

Gene Fitzpatrick

