

***Día de los Muertos / Day of the Dead:
A Passion for Life!***

Celebration Sunday: All-Generations Worship

Sunday, October 30, 2011, 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

First Unitarian Church of San José

Call to Worship: An Introduction to Day of the Dead

Ervin Barrios, Worship Associate

Welcome to the Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead Celebration.

This ancient tradition was celebrated in Mexico by the native nations way before the Spaniard conquerors came from Europe and introduced their Christian traditions.

The Aztecs believed that the cycle of life started when we were born and then we had to die in order to pass thru death and come back and rise as something else. They used to celebrate day of the dead more than once a year.

The Catholic tradition incorporated 2 days in the November calendar, Nov. 1 is called Santos Inocentes, to honor the innocent babies who passed away. Nov. 2, is called Todos Santos/ All Saints, to honor the rest of the people who passed away.

Nowadays, if you were to visit the cemeteries in Mexico during this festivity you will find a true fiesta going on. People come with flowers, food, drinks, fruits, candles, and musical instruments to play music and sing to their loved ones that passed away their favorite songs, and many times they all spend the night at the cemetery.

This is the time of the year when we are supposed to be in touch with those who went ahead of us to another dimension, and celebrate their lives. You can even tell them how much you love them.

The altars to the dead are usually installed inside people's homes. They are an important way for us to pay tribute to our loved ones. We can place their photos and mementos, their favorite clothes, shoes, books, food, sweet bread, candy, chocolate, drinks, etc.

The altars last up to a month and people believe that the souls of the dead come at night to enjoy the offerings.

This spectacular altar in our sanctuary will be in place for 2 weeks.

So, bring the Mariachi, the cha-cha, rock and alternative music and good humor, the portable radios and the i-pods and the smart phones, and let's make a fiesta, an unforgettable party in honor of those we loved when they were alive and who will forever live in our hearts and minds.

Invitation to the “Graveyard”

Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones:

Today we gather in the graveyard, just as families do all over Mexico and all over San José, to remember our loved ones who have died—to bring them back to us by sharing stories about them.

In a little bit, we’re all going to have a chance to share stories with a neighbor about someone or some pet who has died and whom we love and miss so much. We’ll share what they looked like, what they liked to eat, what they liked to do. We’ll share with our neighbor a favorite memory of a time we had with our loved one. We’ll think about what we learned from this person or animal.

To get us in the mood for this sharing, first we’ll hear three brief reflections Jasmine, would you start us off?

Sharing Memories

Rev. Geoff, Jasmine Stapleton-Hart, Rev. Nancy

JASMINE STAPLETON-HART:

I remember my grandpa, Jim Martin, as a comical man. The things that I remember the most are probably that he loved kazoos and taught my brother and me how to play them, and he had the only limo of it’s kind left in the world.

Jim was a jokester and a prankster. He mostly liked pranking people at his work. His boss was a cheap man, and he would always go around picking up change on the ground. So Jim would go around his work and use cement to glue pennies to the ground. When his boss would come by and try to pick them up, he couldn’t because they were glued to the floor.

He found a limo at a junkyard, and being a mechanic for United Airlines, he fixed it up with all of the little details. It really is a beautiful car, and if you see the “before” and “after” pictures, you might not even recognize that they are the same thing. Jim really loved it and he nicknamed the car “The Jimo Limo.” One of his cars was actually in the movie “Tucker.”

He was also a polio survivor using the “Sister Kenny Method” which was where they put hot towels on your joints and then they would move the joints to make them more flexible. Sometimes, when he got older, he would get tired from the polio, but it never stopped him from playing around with us.

Jim taught Evan and me a lot of things. Like, Evan used to have trouble crawling, so Grandpa would get down on the ground and crawl around with Evan all over the floor. He also taught us how to play the kazoo, which we annoyed our parents with on the ride home.

So when Day of the Dead rolls around, I always think of Grandpa Jim and how much I miss him.

REV. GEOFF:

Cocoa was my dog, a German Shorthair Pointer. He was 8 years old when he died from cancer on December 12, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We rescued him from the Humane Society and on the first day he came to live with us he escaped and ran away. Cocoa ran away many times over the 7 years we were together but he always wanted to be found in the end and brought home.

Cocoa was an escape artist. We had to keep an eye out for him because he would take his nose and lift the latches on gates to get out. He loved his freedom; especially the freedom to look for cats or try to dig up ground squirrels or gophers. But he never hurt either one. Yet, there was one time he did do-in a chicken that flew into our back yard.

Cocoa had beautiful short brown hair and a stubby little tail that would wag as fast as a helicopter propeller. Cocoa loved fruit. In fact he would jump up and pull peaches and plums off the branches of the trees in our yard. He did eat a whole plate of spaghetti off the table when no one was looking. And he would whine for the apple core when you were finished eating an apple.

Cocoa was a dog's dog. I loved taking him to the dog park and watching him run with the pack. He could run very fast and then quickly stop and turn like a top.

For Cocoa every dog cookie was like the first cookie, every walk was like the first walk. Cocoa went for the gusto and enjoyed his life to the fullest. I learned from Cocoa how important it is to be in the moment and follow your bliss even if it seems to be in a tunnel underground. Cocoa would pull up turf with his teeth and send big plumes of dirt between his legs digging for the pure joy of digging. He didn't care if he caught anything. It was the delight of the chase that he loved. And I loved him and I know he loved me too.

REV. NANCY:

My mom's name was Jane Jones. She had bright white hair, and every week she went to the beauty parlor to get it styled into a bouffant white helmet. Mom had dark brown eyes that lit up whenever she saw you.

Her favorite food was cottage cheese. Once a year she would have a fancy dessert called a soufflé au Grand Marnier, which she ate in little tiny bites, savoring every one.

My mom loved to sit sideways on a couch, with her legs stretched out in front of her, reading a big fat novel. She unconsciously did this thing with her fingers, rubbing her index and middle fingers around her thumb. Just recently I caught myself doing that—it feels really good!

Every day when I came home from high school, we'd sit down with an ice-cold diet soda called Tab, and talk about my day. Much later, when I was in divinity school and felt called to be a minister, my mom said, "I've realized that *I* am called to listen." She was the person at her church who would meet with the new people, listen to their life stories, and help them get connected to things they liked to do.

When my mom got frustrated, she'd sometimes actually stomp her foot, and then her anger would be completely over, like the passing of a summer thunderstorm. She and I went through some hard times, when I was sure she would *never* understand me. But by the time I was in my forties and had gone through some hard times myself, we were best friends again. When I came home for visits, our best conversations were in the car on the way to the mall. On one of those drives she said, after nearly 60 years of marriage, "Your father is just so *interesting*. Sometimes I think I know everything about him, and sometimes he completely puzzles me."

My mom died on November 7, 2000. She was asleep by the time I arrived, but I got to be the one in the room with her, talking and singing to her, as she took her last breath. A few days earlier, in our last phone conversation, she kept repeating, "I'm *so proud* of you. I'm *so proud* of you," which I think is what every kid most wants to hear from their mom, right?

My mom taught me how to love unconditionally, how to show up for people, and how to be quiet and blessed. I'd like to be just like her. I know she'd want me to be thoroughly myself.

So, what beloved person or pet do *you* want to bring to life by sharing your memories with a neighbor? In your order of service, you'll find a list of questions to help you describe this loved one who has died. Why don't you find that insert now? It suggests these questions:

What did that person or pet look like?

What did they like to eat?

What did they like to do the most?

What's a favorite memory you have of a time you spent
with this person or pet?

What did you learn from them? What stays with you?

I'll ring the bell and you can take a moment in silence to think about what you'd like to share. Then, when I ring the bell again, please turn to a neighbor and listen to their story, and share yours. Remember, this is youth-style worship, so everyone who wants to gets to take part.

[pause]

Reflection

Ervin Barrios

How I learned to love a Mexican Tradition:

Years ago, when we started the Spanish-speaking ministries at this church, the majority of the people that were attending services in Spanish were of a Catholic background. Most people assumed that I had the same background, because I am Mexican. But that was not the case.

My father was a Presbyterian Minister in Mexico, and I grew up within a very conservative Christian family. One of the subjects my father used to preach about was that those who worship idols, saints and virgins, and those who communicate with the dead, are disobeying the Holy Scripture.

Perhaps for that reason I always looked down upon the Catholic people and their religious traditions, as the conservative orthodox Protestant that I was.

When I started attending this congregation, the UU principles of **tolerance and acceptance of one another, as well as the inherent worth and dignity of every person** made an indelible impression in my mind.

It was here in this church that I learned tolerance and acceptance of my Catholic brothers and sisters, and it was also here where I embraced the colorful ancient Mexican tradition of celebrating the Day of the Dead. Which I could not celebrate being Protestant.

I had seen many altars while growing up in Mexico, and then with the Mexican community in California, after moving to the U.S. So, I helped to set up the very first altar to the Dead at this church.

Soon after that, for the first time in my life, I installed my own altar to the Dead inside my home, with photos of my late father. It was precisely this tradition which helped me in closing cycles and solving some issues after the loss of my father. I am very happy about that, and I am sure my father, wherever he is, he must be very happy about that too.