

Preparation For Session S71 - Day of the Dead

I regret that many modernized countries no longer celebrate a "day of the dead." The deceased seem to have no place, no usefulness, in a culture devoted to industrial production. Individual friends and relatives are remembered, but we extend no hand of greeting to the multitudes of dead as a community. Our lack of hospitality separates us from an important human tradition. Perhaps we are missing many opportunities to receive direct assistance from the "friendly dead" who still take interest in our lives.

-- Dianne Skafte, *When Oracles Speak*

The Days of the Dead are celebrated by people of many cultures, all over the world. During this time we honor the dead, both those whom we have known personally, as well as the ancestors we may not have met, but whose lives influence ours in many ways. We might honor them by reflecting on their memory, creating altars, and bringing family and friends together to share stories of our loved ones. As we celebrate this tradition we might share laughter and tears that can help us to heal our loss. As we reflect on the lives of those whose memory and legacy we carry, we might also be reminded that we are each like links in a long chain, connected to more distant past and future than we normally imagine. In this way it can also become a time to reflect on our own lives, and the legacy we ourselves pass on.

In our church community there are several opportunities to participate in the celebration, in addition to the small group session. You may find that participating in more than one aspect allows for a deepening of the experience. Below are several suggestions to help you prepare for this time. In addition to preparing for your group meeting, you may also enjoy making paper flowers or baking bread to be used on the church altar (individually or with your group), or helping to decorate the church altar, Saturday, October 26th.

1. The Days of the Dead can be a time to remember, honor, heal, support, and celebrate. Take some time to think about whom you would like to honor or remember at this time. It may be someone who has died recently, and still feels very near. It may be an ancestor or group of ancestors. It may be a person who is not in your family, but whose legacy you carry, nevertheless. You may be surprised to find a particular person or memory presents itself unexpectedly, asking for your attention.
2. Prepare an altar at home, or gather items to bring to the church altar and/or your small group meeting. What pictures, food, or mementos would beckon that person/spirit back?
3. Spend some time relating to the person who is present for you: sitting with a picture or memento, talking with others who knew him or her, writing a letter to or imagining a dialog with your loved one. What significance does this person's memory hold for you? What message might that person send?
4. What might you do differently if you were to take this message seriously? How might you more deeply honor what has been passed on to you in your own life? How might you carry forward the inheritance/legacy?