



October Membership Resource

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In partnership with:





About This Resource

Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is a vibrant celebration of life in the midst of death, hope, joy, and humor in the midst of despair. This holiday, which is celebrated on October 31st through November 2nd of each year, originated in Mexico but has spread throughout the world, integrating both indigenous and Catholic traditions. It is full of art, food, music, and dance, engaging all the senses and reuniting loved ones in both body and in spirit.

Christianity in the United States doesn't typically provide many spiritual rituals for honoring departed loved ones, and many of us prefer to avoid the subject of death altogether. For this reason, our October resource seeks to share a bit of the spiritual wisdom of Día de los Muertos, that you might learn new ways to integrate grief and joyful remembrance into your faith.

However, while we at JustFaith Ministries are excited to share about this vibrant and meaningful tradition, we are also mindful of the way that Día de los Muertos has been culturally appropriated, disrespecting and dehumanizing our Mexican brothers and sisters. For this reason, we have included an important video for you to watch before engaging in any of the activities or meditations.

If you are interested in the conversation about migration or immigration, consider signing up for Exploring Migration: A Faith Journey, our 8-week program on the issue of migration. Visit our page to learn more and enroll your community in the journey!

Resource Links

- Required Preparatory Video: "7 Myths about Cultural Appropriation"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXeJdHrGOuI>
- Suggested Preparatory reading: Check out this site for more in-depth historical information about Día de los Muertos:
<http://online.nationalhispaniccenter.org/dia-de-los-muertos/origins.html>
- Mexican Day of the Dead: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FhrhH9k-PY>



- Coco discussion questions for children:
<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/blog/5-conversations-to-have-with-your-kids-after-coco>
- Slideshow journaling activity:
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CgAqYlOMjkCS09oWT94gXxOnf-OntiSG3IM7AdlxkA/edit?usp=sharing>
- Pan de Muerto recipe:
<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/7224/pan-de-muertos-mexican-bread-of-the-dead/>
- Papel Picado activity:
<https://www.caciqueinc.com/blog/how-to-make-papel-picado-at-home/>
- Make Paper Marigolds:
<https://www.holajalapeno.com/how-to-make-paper-flowers-for-day-of-the-dead/>
- Decorate Sugar Skulls:
<https://theothersideofthetortilla.com/2013/11/how-to-make-sugar-skulls-for-dia-de-los-muertos/>
- Video: “This Día De Los Muertos, Let’s Honor Those Who Died Looking For The American Dream.” <https://tinyurl.com/y2g6ho8s>



Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead

Things you need:

- Computer and Projector
- Handouts for all participants
- Materials for crafts
- Tealights and matches
- Paper or journal
- Pens/pencils
- Crayons or markers for children

Mandatory Session Preparational Video

Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos is a sacred and spiritual practice. Please take a minute to read and meditate on the following distinction: *these activities are meant to help educate our JustFaith family of this rich and meaningful tradition, rather than to claim it for ourselves.* For this reason, we are asking that you watch the video “7 Myths about Cultural Appropriation” before engaging in the rest of these activities. This video may feel harsh and even a bit offensive; however, we know that our JustFaith community seeks to deepen our spiritual lives in a way that respects all cultures and people groups.

Required preparation: “7 Myths about Cultural Appropriation”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXejDhRGOUl>

Suggested Preparation: Check out this site for more in-depth historical information about Día de los Muertos: <http://online.nationalhispaniccenter.org/dia-de-los-muertos/origins.html>



Opening Meditation (10 minutes)

Read this meditation aloud to yourself or to your group.

Meditation for Día de los Muertos By Katie Kandarian-Morris¹

As we begin to settle to a deeper more inward place;
to be fully present right now in this place made for head and heart together;
we might begin to feel how our own bodies are not only flesh and blood –
but skeleton bones as well.

No matter how old we are,
no matter how we move from place to place,
we humans are skeletal beings.

I welcome you all to this embodied meditation.

First, as we make ourselves consciously comfortable

let us feel the various parts of our bodies

beginning from the top of our heads—the skull inside:

feeling our cheekbones

the teeth within our mouth

the opening and closing of our jaw... Moving to our shoulders—our clavicle

scapula... now feeling how our breathing expands and contracts our ribs....

As we can, arms go wide and big all the way down to our phalanges....

¹ This meditation can be found at uaa.org.



out and back down. Now legs—consider your femur, your thigh bone.

Those folks sitting move their femur if you can:

one at a time,

up and down...

Those of you standing—Lift your skeleton leg up and down, up and down.

Toes—imagine bones inside our toes. Wiggle them if you can. Feel the movement and stillness of bones of the pieces of our bodies.

The calacas—Calaveras—skeleton bodies of those living and dead—not so different, remind us that we, too, are mortal

and are connected by the love that shines through our lives.

Let our breath connect us with the loved ones gone before us.

Listen. *[Silence for a time.]* AMEN

* *Calaca* (pronounced kah-LA-kah) is a colloquial Mexican Spanish name for skeleton; especially human skeleton figures that are used for decoration during Día de los muertos.

** *Calavera* (pronounced kah-lah-VAIR-rah) is Spanish for "skull." During Día de los muertos, decorative human skulls are made from either sugar or clay.

ABOUT DIA DE LOS MUERTOS/DAY OF THE DEAD

This section provides an overview of Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos. There are two options: one for adults, and one for children.

**For adults: Video Discussion/Journaling: “Mexican Day of the Dead”
(30 minutes)**



Watch the video “Mexican Day of the Dead” (5:16).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FHRhH9k-PY>

Then lead the group in discussion around – or journal about – the following questions:

- What stood out to you from this video?
- What are your favorite ways that you, your family, or your church remember those who have died? Do you have rituals or traditions around death that are meaningful to you?
- “The Day of the Dead is regarded as a time when the dead can come alive again.” Have you ever felt the presence of a loved one who has died?
- Have you ever experienced celebration in the midst of grief, loss, or death?

For children: Watch Disney’s *Coco* (2 hours)

Consider making an evening out of the experience by making dinner together before or after the movie. You can find easy traditional Mexican recipes online. Try to find out which recipes are truly traditional (for example, when people in Mexico talk about burritos, they are probably referring to small donkeys, not a tortilla stuffed with steak and beans!). Tostadas, chilaquiles, horchata, enchiladas, and soft-shelled tacos are easy, kid-friendly options.

Watching *Coco* together could be an opportunity for meaningful conversation around difficult subjects such as racism, death, tricky family relationships, and grief. Here are some questions to help guide your discussion.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/blog/5-conversations-to-have-with-your-kids-after-coco>

Journaling/Drawing Activity (40 minutes)

This slide show will explain the meaning behind symbols and traditional elements of Day of the Dead. If you are facilitating the conversation with a group, read aloud the commentary in the “speaker notes” session, and then give participants 7 minutes of silence to journal or draw in response to the associated question. If you are doing this activity with children, you will want to have plenty of paper, crayons, and markers available.



Slideshow link:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CgAqYlOMjkCS09oWT94gXxOnf-OntiSG3IM7AdlxA/edit?usp=sharing>

After the slideshow, ask participants to share which symbol was particularly meaningful to them and why.

Other Creative Activities

Incorporate as many of these activities into your time together as you would like.

- Make Pan de Muerto (bread of the dead): This sweet bread, usually made in the shape of a skull, is placed on the altar of the loved one. However, it's okay for you to eat it too! On the Day of the Dead, the family usually eats the loved one's favorite foods and the pan de muerto. Here is a recipe: <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/7224/pan-de-muertos-mexican-bread-of-the-dead/>
- Make Papel Picado: These colorful flags flutter in the wind during special holidays, especially Día de los Muertos. They are celebratory reminders of the impermanence of life. <https://www.caciqueinc.com/blog/how-to-make-papel-picado-at-home/>
- Make paper marigolds: The smell of marigolds and a trail of their petals lead the spirits of loved ones back home. <https://www.holajalapeno.com/how-to-make-paper-flowers-for-day-of-the-dead/>
- Decorate sugar skulls: Sugar skulls are not only placed on altars as decorations, but they also are often given as gifts to coworkers or friends. Learn how to make them here: <https://theothersideofthetortilla.com/2013/11/how-to-make-sugar-skulls-for-dia-de-los-muertos/>



Remembering Migrants

Note: The way this activity is presented is probably not suitable for young children (though JustFaith does encourage parents in our community to educate kids about the realities of migration!)

Watch the video embedded in the article “This Día De Los Muertos, Let’s Honor Those Who Died Looking For The American Dream.”

<https://tinyurl.com/y2g6ho8s>

Then ask participants what surprised or moved them.

Close by reading an adapted version of Psalm 137, written by Joan Maruskin in *Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome*.

By the waters of the Rio Grande, there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our guitars, for there the border patrol asked us for songs and the vigilantes asked for laughter, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

By the waters we weep and remember. We remember Mexico and El Salvador. We remember Honduras and Darfur. We remember Colombia and Bosnia. We remember Cuba and Haiti. We remember China and Romania. By the waters we remember.

On the willows we hung up our guitars. We hung up our hopes. We hung up our hoes, our land, our dreams. We hung up our poverty, our hunger, our thirst. We hung up our friends, our traditions, our culture. We hung up our family ties, our food, our language.

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? We sing only the song of the homeless, the unemployed, the laments of hunger and thirst, of death and destruction, the songs of the songless, the hungry, the thirsty, the songs of the lonely, the songs of the dying.

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

Invite participants to pause for a moment of silence as they pray for migrants who are crossing the desert right now, as well as the families who have lost their loved ones who died looking for the American dream.



Prayer of Remembrance

*From "Day of the Dead/All Souls" by Christine Robinson
Found at uaa.org*

Facilitator: Have everyone gather around the tea lights. Then say:

The summer has faded now and [we prepare for] the coming of winter. The frost has taken our tender plants, leaves have begun to fall from the trees, geese begin to arrive from the north.

The days are cooler, the weather is unsettled, and the evenings are suddenly dark.

At this darkening time of the year, our thoughts turn to things past, to life retreating to those who are no longer with us. Images come to our minds: dear companions who once graced our lives, loved ones whom we miss, persons whose lives made an impact on our lives, all of those who were here, contributing, caring, and our now gone.

Our memories bring both joy and sadness. Let us not push these feelings away, for our recollections attest to the enduring importance of these friends, this love, our memories. May these brave and lovely spirits live again in our tender thoughts, and prove that death and distance are powerless to sever the bonds that connect truly loving hearts.

And now, let us name aloud those whom we honor and remember, as we light a candle their honor.

Allow time for participants to light the candle whenever they are ready.

Then invite everyone to pray aloud together:

All: Spirit of Life, whom we know best in our own loving and being loved,
hold us as we remember those we have loved,



and those who have loved us.

May our gratitude sparkle in our lives,

may our tears [annoint] our souls.

Help us to know that we are not alone in our grieving,

and help us also to come to that peaceful place

in which we can take what we learned

from those who have gone before us into our own lives.

Remind us that we, too, are mortal;

and that the only enduring legacy we leave

is the love that shines through our lives.

Amen.

Handouts

Meditation for Día de los Muertos

By Katie Kandarian-Morris²

As we begin to settle to a deeper more inward place;

to be fully present right now in this place made for head and heart together;

we might begin to feel how our own bodies are not only flesh and blood –

but skeleton bones as well.

No matter how old we are,

² This meditation can be found at:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/moving-meditation-dia-de-los-muertos>



no matter how we move from place to place,

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let us feel the various parts of our bodies

beginning from the top of our heads—the skull inside:

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the opening and closing of our jaw... Moving to our shoulders—our clavicle

scapula... now feeling how our breathing expands and contracts our ribs....

As we can, arms go wide and big all the way down to our phalanges....

out and back down. Now legs—consider your femur, your thigh bone.

Those folks sitting move their femur if you can:

one at a time,

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Listen. *[Silence for a time.]* AMEN



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Psalm 137

by Joan Maruskin

Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome

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How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

Prayer of Remembrance

Facilitator:

The summer has faded now and these first days of November mark the beginning of the coming of winter. The frost has taken our tender plants, leaves have begun to fall from the trees, geese begin to arrive from the north.



The days are cooler, the weather is unsettled, and the evenings are suddenly dark.

At this darkening time of the year, our thoughts turn to things past, to life retreating to those who are no longer with us. Images come to our minds: dear companions who once graced our lives, loved ones whom we miss, persons whose lives made an impact on our lives, all of those who were here, contributing, caring, and our now gone.

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And now, let us name aloud those whom we honor and remember, as we light a candle their honor.

Time of candle lighting and remembrance

All:

**Spirit of Life, whom we know best in our own loving and being loved,
hold us as we remember those we have loved,
and those who have loved us.**

**May our gratitude sparkle in our lives,
may our tears [annoint] our souls.**

**Help us to know that we are not alone in our grieving,
and help us also to come to that peaceful place**

**in which we can take what we learned
from those who have gone before us into our own lives.**

**Remind us that we, too, are mortal;
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is the love that shines through our lives.

Amen.