

CONGREGATIONAL TOOLKIT FOR EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS 2021
Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries
Commission for Intercultural Ministries
Episcopal Diocese of Northern California

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction to the Diocesan Observance
- Introduction to the Congregational Toolkit
- Introduction to El Día de los Muertos
- Planning and Preparation
- Resources for Worship
- Resources for Pastoral Care
- Resources for *Ofrendas* (Altars)
- Resources for *Desfiles* (Processions)
- Resources for Outreach and Publicity
- Resources for Cultural and Historical Background

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIOCESAN OBSERVANCE

All congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California are warmly invited to join in observing El Día de Los Muertos on All Saints Sunday, November 7, 2021. This diocesan observance was proposed in June 2020 by the Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries, a working group of the diocesan Commission for Intercultural Ministries, and approved by the Office of the Bishop in July 2020. Several congregations participated in 2020, and we invite more congregations to do so in 2021.

Why observe El Día de Los Muertos again this year? Like last year, this year has brought widespread loss, loneliness, and grief like few others in recent history. As people around the world grieve the terrible toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church is called to offer pastoral care and consolation to all who have lost loved ones. As wildfires in California ravage communities already weakened by the COVID-19 crisis, the Church is called to stand as a place of refuge and a wellspring of resilience. As people across the United States rise up for social justice, the Church is called to speak prophetic truth to power. As polarized politics fail us in this time of urgent need, the Church is called to give renewed witness to the way of love and the vision of beloved community.

In the communities served by the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have fallen disproportionately hard on people of Latino/Hispanic identity and heritage. Economic inequity, political disenfranchisement, anti-immigrant bias, and discriminatory policing remain pervasive facts of Latino/Hispanic experience. Yet Latino/Hispanic culture offers a unique opportunity not only to mourn the dead but also to affirm and celebrate life in community: El Día de Los Muertos, a festival originating in central and southern Mexico and now widely observed in Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. By observing El Día de Los Muertos as local congregations and as a diocese, we have an opportunity to offer a sacred and civic space for the great grief of this extraordinary time, and to express our solidarity with our Latino/Hispanic congregants, neighbors, and friends. Participation in El Día de los Muertos by clergy, parishes, missions, and other local ministries is entirely voluntary. We hope that many clergy and congregations will participate to embody a corporate embrace of our shared grief and enact a unifying expression of our solidarity.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONGREGATIONAL TOOLKIT

This congregational toolkit provides practical resources to help clergy and lay leaders plan, prepare, and publicize an observance of El Día de Los Muertos for the local congregation and community.

The Episcopal *Book of Occasional Services 2018* establishes a canonical precedent and a brief outline for the observance of El Día de los Muertos. A press release from the Episcopal Church notes: “Where it seems appropriate, instead of complete rites, the *Book of Occasional Services 2018* includes paragraphs of stated principles and guidelines for crafting liturgies in particular contexts. For instance, the resources for Día de Muertos are offered in outline form. A part of the outline format is an expressed desire that those congregations wishing to develop and use the rite will do so in collaboration with communities for whom the celebration is already a culturally significant event, creating opportunities for deeper appreciation and love in congregations.”

This toolkit provides a growing collection of practical resources for planning and preparation, worship, pastoral care, and outreach and publicity. It also includes resources on two key traditional practices, namely *ofrendas* (altars) and *desfiles* (processions), and on the cultural and historical background of El Día de los Muertos.

This voluntary diocesan observance is meant to be adapted as appropriate to each local context of ministry, with deep respect for the local Latino/Hispanic communities that we seek to serve. We urge a spirit of humility with regard to our own cultural competencies, and we encourage clergy and congregations to partner with local Latino/Hispanic organizations to strengthen relationships and ensure that we do not engage in cultural appropriation for our own ends.

This congregational toolkit was created by members of Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries, a working group of the Commission for Intercultural Ministries of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California. The lead author and project coordinator was Jim Schaal, Executive Director of the Center at St. Matthew’s, a community service center of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California located in the Arden Arcade area of Sacramento County.

Like any good toolkit, it may be expanded and updated from time to time. We will announce and distribute any major updates as they become available. We welcome your comments, corrections, and especially your suggestions for any additional resources. Please send all feedback on the toolkit to Jim Schaal at stmatthewsepiscopal@gmail.com and to the Commission on Intercultural Ministries at NorCalCIM@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION TO EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

Since March 2020, our faith communities have gathered online to keep our people safe and healthy in accordance with public health orders and diocesan directives. Only in recent months have some churches been able to re-gather for in-person worship. Even in August 2021, indoor church gatherings in California are limited in capacity, with masking and distancing still required. Yet in such a time as this, the suffering is too severe, the grief too great, the lamentation too long to be contained in virtual spaces. In such a time as this, we need a sacred and civic space—located in a physical and public place, shaped by strong symbols and rich rituals—to give us room to express our shared sorrows.

Latino/Hispanic culture offers just such a sacred and civic space, just such symbols and rituals, in the form of El Día de Los Muertos. Originating in central and southern Mexico with roots in both Mesoamerican Nahua practices and Mexican Catholic practices, this festival is now widely observed in other Latin American countries and in Spanish-speaking communities around the world. In Mexico, the “Day of the Dead” is commonly observed over two days: the day of *los inocentes* (the children) or *los angelitos* (the little angels) corresponding to All Saints’ Day, and the day of *los muertos* (the dead) or *los difuntos* (the deceased) corresponding to All Souls’ Day. For the diocesan observance, we will combine both days on All Saints’ Sunday (November 7, 2021). Local congregations may extend their observance before or after All Saints’ Sunday if desired. For example, the community *ofrenda* (altar) may be set up beginning on All Saints’ Day (Monday, November 1, 2021) and kept in place through mid-November so that people can enjoy it longer.

Like the Episcopal liturgy for All Saints’ Day, traditional observances of El Día de Los Muertos are marked by solemn words and dignified processions as well as fragrant flowers and joyous song. The Mexican festival also invites a spontaneity of expression and an almost macabre sense of humor that helps participants come to terms with the reality of death. *Ofrendas* (altars) are richly decorated with flowers (usually *cempasúchiles* or Mexican marigolds), photos, and mementos of the dead. Other items are more playful: *calaveras* (fancifully figured skulls), *catrinas* (whimsically well-dressed skeletons), favorite foods, and beloved beverages. All these elements and more, especially those elements suggested by our Latino/Hispanic neighbors, can be incorporated in a local observance of El Día de Los Muertos. While the festive air of El Día de Los Muertos may seem frivolous to those accustomed to more somber observances, it does serve to make death a more “normal” and accepted part of life. With some attention to explaining the significance of the less familiar symbols and rituals, we can enrich both our cultural awareness and our liturgical vocabulary.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

September 2021

- Save the diocesan date of observance of El Día de los Muertos (All Saints' Sunday, November 7, 2021) in your worship and program planning calendar. Your congregation may also choose to extend the observance before or after this date.
- Review the El Día de los Muertos 2021 toolkit distributed by the EDNC Task Force for Latino/Hispanic Ministries (this document, available in September 2021).
- Engage your Vestry or Mission Committee, your Worship Committee (or similar), and your clergy team (if applicable) to develop support for El Día de los Muertos.
- Select an individual (clergy or lay) or a small team to plan and coordinate El Día de los Muertos for your congregation.
- If possible, partner with a local Latino/Hispanic organization well in advance for help with cultural understanding, planning, and publicity.

October 2021

- Watch the Diocesan e-News for any updates to this congregational toolkit. □ Continue to develop your plans for El Día de los Muertos, using suggestions from “Resources for Worship” and “Resources for Pastoral Care” below.
- By Sunday October 10, inform your entire congregation of your specific plans for the observance. If you are asking congregants to share written reflections on their experiences of El Día de los Muertos, be sure to ask them now. If you are asking Spanish speakers to read a portion of the liturgy in Spanish, ask them now and give them time to practice.
- Invite Latino/Hispanic members of your congregation to write brief reflections on their experiences of El Día de los Muertos; publish these in your newsletter and on your website in advance of the observance.
- Invite parishioners to submit the names of the beloved deceased for the All Saints' necrology. □ By Sunday October 17, begin taking steps described under “Resources for Outreach and Publicity” below. Prepare any posters, press releases, newspaper advertisements, or other print media in plenty of time for publication.
- By Sunday October 25, select the site for your community *ofrenda* (altar) and the route for your *desfile* (procession). See “Resources for *Ofrendas*” and “Resources for *Desfiles*” below. □ Before proceeding with plans for your community *ofrenda* and *desfiles*, check state and county public guidelines and your congregation's regathering plan for the latest guidance on keeping participants safe and healthy.
- By Sunday October 31, have your community *ofrenda* set up and ready to receive items placed by parishioners and community members. See “Resources for *Ofrendas*” below.

- As the community *ofrenda* grows, take photos and videos and share them on your congregation's website, Facebook page, Twitter page, or other social media. With their permission, take photos and videos of community members placing their items—or simply invite them to send “selfies” to the church's email address.

November 2021

- On Saturday, November 6, check the community *ofrenda* for any flowers, greenery, fruit, or other perishable items that need to be refreshed. Take photos and videos of the *ofrenda* at its peak. □ On November 7, 2021 (All Saints' Sunday), celebrate El Día de los Muertos in worship— whether online, in-person, or a combination of both as determined by current public health guidelines and your congregation's plan for regathering. See “Resources for Worship” below. □ If worship can be safely held in person, conclude the service with a live *desfile* (procession) from the worship space to the community *ofrenda*. Be sure to take more photos and videos. If worship is online only—or a hybrid of online and in-person—play a pre-recorded video of a virtual procession for the online audience. See “Resources for *Desfiles*” below.
- Following the *desfile*, invite participants to retrieve any photos, mementos, and other items they have placed on the community *ofrenda*. If possible, leave the *ofrenda* up until at least November 15 to allow time for people to enjoy it longer.
- Post photos and videos on your congregation's website and social media. □ By November 16, send your best photos and videos of your congregation's observance to the Office of the Bishop at communications@norcalepiscopal.org and to the Commission on Intercultural Ministries at NorCalCIM@gmail.com. Include a brief description of your observance and let us all know how it went!

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP

The Episcopal *Book of Occasional Services 2018* establishes a canonical precedent for the observance of El Día de los Muertos. The diocesan Task Force on Latino/Hispanic Ministries suggests the following links for worship planners. We welcome your suggestions for other links.

The Book of Occasional Services 2018 / Libro de Ritos Ocasionales 2018

<https://www.generalconvention.org/publications#liturgy>

This companion to *The Book of Common Prayer 1979*, available here for free download in both PDF and Word .docx formats, includes an outline for El Día de los Muertos on page 115 in the English edition and page 109 in the Spanish edition.

Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission

<https://liturgyandmission.org/2017/05/25/all-saints-day/>

A helpful introduction to All Saints Day and All Souls Day, with page references to *The Book of Common Prayer 1979* and *The Book of Occasional Services 2018*.

Liturgy: Spiritual Practices for a Digital World

<https://liturgy.co.nz/all-souls-day>

<https://liturgy.co.nz/all-souls-2>

<https://liturgy.co.nz/all-souls-3>

<https://liturgy.co.nz/church-year/allsaintsvigil>

This website includes three collections of prayers for All Souls Day, including several from churches in the Anglican Communion, and a litany for an All Saints Vigil.

Episcopal Café:

<https://www.episcopalcafe.com/another-triduum-dia-de-los-muertos-all-saints-all-souls/>

A brief article by Patricia Steagall highlighting Episcopal observances of El Día de los Muertos and drawing parallels to the Paschal Triduum.

Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis:

<https://churchofstmartin.org/2019/10/15/what-is-dia-de-los-muertos-and-how-does-it-relate-to-all-saints-day/>

A brief article by Gabe Avila relating El Día de los Muertos to Allhallowtide.

<https://churchofstmartin.org/2020/11/24/dia-de-los-muertos-virtual-ofrenda/>

A beautiful video by Matthew Campbell and Gabe Avila (with music by Janie Knudsen) of the indoor *ofrenda* and outdoor chalk *ofrenda* at the Episcopal Church of St. Martin in Davis.

RESOURCES FOR PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral Care for the Bereaved

Because the primary focus of El Día de los Muertos is to remember and honor the deceased, be prepared to provide spiritual and emotional support for members of your congregation and your community who have lost a loved one. For example:

- Partner with a local hospice agency well in advance for information on bereavement support services in your community; equip your pastoral caregivers (clergy or lay) with these resources to share with the bereaved.
- If your congregation has Stephen Ministers or other trained lay pastoral caregivers, prepare them to be present and available during your congregation's observance of El Día de los Muertos. If your congregation offers Healing Prayer, plan a time for this during your congregation's observance of El Día de los Muertos.
- Like any tradition surrounding matters of life and death, El Día de los Muertos carries multiple meanings (religious, cultural, familial, and personal) and may evoke strong emotions; avoid making assumptions about people's feelings and try to meet people where they are.

Pastoral Care for the Traumatized

Because many others in your congregation and your community may have experienced trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent crises, be prepared to provide spiritual and emotional support for them. For example:

- People who have been hospitalized, isolated, quarantined, or suffered symptoms of COVID-19.
- Doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, medical technicians, and other healthcare workers.
- Paramedics, EMTs, firefighters, law enforcement officers, and other first responders.
- Essential workers exposed to COVID-19 risks in their workplaces.
- Workers who have been laid off, furloughed, or otherwise suffered a loss of employment.
- Business owners who have been negatively affected by economic disruptions.
- Latinx, Black, Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and other people of color affected by systemic injustices in healthcare, education, housing, and law enforcement.
- People affected by wildfires, floods, earthquakes, or other disasters.
- People experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, hunger, or food insecurity.

RESOURCES FOR OFRENDAS (ALTARS)

Community Ofrenda

- The community *ofrenda* (altar) will be the focal point of each congregation's observance of El Día de los Muertos. In the original Mexican tradition, each family or household would set up an *ofrenda* in the home to honor the beloved dead and invite the spirits of the deceased. In more recent times, communities throughout Latin America and the United States have also set up shared *ofrendas* at churches, schools, plazas, and other gathering places. These contemporary community *ofrendas* complement the private, domestic, and familial space of the traditional home *ofrenda* with a public, civic, and communal space for shared observance.
- Choose a suitable location on your church grounds for a community *ofrenda* that is accessible to the neighborhood, amenable to quiet reflection, safe to visit, and protected from the elements.
- First, consider an outdoor location such as a meditation garden, a memorial garden, an outdoor columbarium, or an outdoor labyrinth. If rain is likely in early November, choose a sheltered spot such as a covered alcove, a roofed breezeway, a lych gate, a garden gazebo, or a picnic shelter. Or try setting up a folding canopy or other temporary rain shelter.
- Second, consider an uncrowded indoor location such as the narthex, a side chapel, or the parish hall. If the location is indoors, give thought to how it may be made accessible to the wider community while remaining secure when no one is present.
- Whatever the location, please follow all current public health guidelines. As of August 2021, best practices include masking, distancing, and handwashing. As a gesture of hospitality, provide free disposable masks and hand sanitizer for visitors.
- Place one or more tables for the community *ofrenda*. If available, arrange tables of different heights to form a stepped display. Tables may be covered with plain black cloth or with festive Mexican-style patterned cloth.
- Decorate the community *ofrenda* with colorful cut or potted flowers (traditionally *cempasúchiles* or Mexican marigolds), fresh greenery from the church grounds, votive candles, and perhaps small bowls of fresh fruit. Leave plenty of space for parishioners and community members to place photos and mementos; place a few samples to help visitors see where to put their items.
- If possible, decorate the community *ofrenda* with traditional Mexican items for El Día de los Muertos such as *calaveras* (fancifully figured skulls), *catrinas* (whimsically well-dressed skeletons), and *pan de muertos* (sweet bread). These are commonly available at local Hispanic/Latino groceries and *tiendas*, or they can be ordered online. Although some visitors may find them unfamiliar, most Hispanic/Latino visitors will feel right at home when they see these.
- Other items often seen on the traditional home *ofrenda*, such as liquor and candy, are not recommended for the community *ofrenda*.

- If theft or vandalism might be a concern at your chosen site, do not place valuable or irreplaceable items on the community *ofrenda*.
- Items such as prayer flags, banners, streamers, and balloons are not strictly traditional, but they may be included if they would be meaningful to your congregation. Blank prayer flags, in particular, provide a wonderful way for people to add their own written prayers and wishes to the community *ofrenda*.
- Be sure to display a welcoming sign for your church or mission and a sign inviting visitors to place their own items on the community *ofrenda*.
- Beginning in mid-October, invite parishioners to bring and place photos or other small mementos of departed family and friends on the community *ofrenda*.
- Invite homebound parishioners to email photos to the church office for printing and placement on the community *ofrenda*.
- Also beginning in mid-October, encourage parishioners to invite their friends, neighbors, and co-workers to bring and place photos or other small mementos of departed family and friends on the community *ofrenda*. This is an excellent opportunity to begin the process of inviting, welcoming, and connecting.



Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Benicia

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento



Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa



Rosa



St. Matthew's Episcopal Church,
Sacramento:



Send Photos and Videos from Your Church
to:

The Office of the Bishop at
communications@norcalepiscopal.org
and The Commission on Intercultural
Ministries at NorCalCIM@gmail.com

RESOURCES FOR DESFILES (PROCESSIONS)

- If public health guidelines and your congregation's plan for regathering permit worship to be held in person on November 7, plan for a closing *desfile* (procession) from the worship space to the community *ofrenda*. All participants in the procession should be masked and distanced.
- If worship cannot safely be held in person on November 7, or if some will attend worship online while others attend in person, plan to record a video of a virtual procession from the worship space to the community *ofrenda*. Even if some will attend in person, a video recording is a good way to share the moment with those who cannot attend in person. Plan to post the video on your Facebook page, on your Twitter page, or as a screen share in a Zoom gathering.
- During the procession, it is appropriate to observe silence or to play appropriate recorded music. Under current public health orders and diocesan guidelines as of August 2021, congregation singing and chanting are not permitted in worship.

RESOURCES FOR OUTREACH AND PUBLICITY

- The observance of El Día de los Muertos offers a special opportunity for outreach to Latino/Hispanic people in your community. Here are some suggestions:
- If possible, partner with a local Latino/Hispanic organization well in advance for help with cultural understanding, planning, and publicity.
- Share your publicity with local nonprofit organizations serving immigrants, refugees, and asylees from Latin America.

- Share your publicity with local schools, principals, and teachers offering Spanish immersion or bilingual education. Many public schools in Northern California now offer events for El Día de los Muertos, which are good opportunities to connect with interested parents.
- Because El Día de los Muertos 2021 will fall in a year of continuing global and national grief, we can highlight the public dimension of the COVID-19 tragedy without seeking to politicize the occasion. We can also invite the broader community, especially those who are bereaved or traumatized, to partake in the spiritual and emotional support of the church. Consider these suggestions: □ Invite your mayor, city council members, county supervisors, public health director, and other
- local officials to attend your congregation's observance of El Día de los Muertos—whether online or in-person as conditions allow.
- Publicize the community *ofrenda* and observance on your website, your Facebook page, your Twitter feed, and other social media.
- Publicize the observance in your church newsletter and worship bulletins.
- Send a press release to your local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.
- Print and place posters on community bulletin boards and information kiosks.
- During the observance, take photos and videos to post on your church website, Facebook page, Twitter page, or other social media.
- By November 15, send your best photos and videos of your congregation's observance to the Office of the Bishop at communications@norcalepiscopal.org and to the Commission on Intercultural Ministries at NorCalCIM@gmail.com.
- As always, ask for permission to take photos or videos, and respect the privacy of those who prefer not to be photographed or recorded on video. This is especially sensitive for visitors who may be undocumented, as well as those who wish to grieve in peace.

RESOURCES FOR CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The following links offer resources for further information on the history, cultural meanings, and contemporary observances of El Día de los Muertos. We welcome your suggestions for other links that you have found informative or inspiring.

The National Hispanic Cultural Center:

online.nationalhispaniccenter.org/dia-de-los-muertos.html

A multi-page website feature on the history, cultural meanings, and contemporary practices of El Día de los Muertos. Includes a video, a glossary, and lesson plans for K-12 students.

The University of New Mexico Latin American and Iberian Institute:

laji.unm.edu/info/k-12-educators/assets/documents/dia-de-los-muertos/about-dia-de-los-muertos.pdf

A text-oriented introduction to the history, cultural meanings, and contemporary practices of El Día de los Muertos. Suitable for printing as an educational handout.

The Smithsonian Latino Center:

latino.si.edu/learn/teaching-and-learning-resources/day-dead-resources A multi-site collection about El Día de los Muertos including virtual gallery exhibits on Google Arts and Culture, an interactive iBook, and an animated presentation on iTunes.

The Latino Center of Art and Culture: thelatinocenter.org/#el-panteon-de-sacramento

The Latino Center for Art and Culture in Sacramento has hosted El Día de los Muertos festivals for more than ten years.

The Museum of Sonoma County: museumsc.org/2020-dia-de-los-muertos/

The Museum of Sonoma County in Santa Rosa offers an interactive virtual tour of its 2020 exhibit on El Día de los Muertos.

The Oakland Museum of California: museumca.org/virtual-el-dia-de-los-muertos

The Oakland Museum of California offers virtual tours, performances, and curriculum materials relating to El Día de los Muertos.

Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

peabody.harvard.edu/node/287?q=node/723

Includes K-12 teaching materials on El Día de los Muertos in both English and Spanish. A good resource for Children's Formation or family learning at home.

PBS Kids for Parents: pbs.org/parents/thrive/day-of-the-dead-books-for-kids

An annotated bibliography of children's books on El Día de los Muertos in both English and Spanish. Another good resource for Children's Formation or family learning at home.

National Geographic:

nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/north-america/mexico/top-ten-day-of-dead-mexico/

A "Top Ten Things to Know" article on El Día de los Muertos, written from a travel perspective.