

**"Day of the Dead" ©**  
**Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister**  
**November 8, 2009**

*When we allow ourselves to feel our place along the continuum of life and death, it moves us deeply. Facing death sharpens our sense of being alive and our connection to one another. And the dead help remind us of what is most meaningful and joyous in the world. Ultimately, then, the Día de los Muertos celebrates life."*

**PRELUDE<sup>1</sup>**

*(In the spirit of peace, we invite you into silence and quiet reflection while we listen to the prelude.)*

**CALL TO GATHER**

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

"Come, come, whoever you are;  
Man, woman, parent, child  
Whatever your religious journey,  
Whatever your skin color,  
Whatever your abilities,  
Whomever you love-  
You are welcome here this morning.  
You are welcome at our table.  
You are welcome in this religious home."

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, affectionately known as MUUS. It is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this wonderful congregation. We welcome all of you.

- If you are a newcomer, and haven't signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our activities. Newcomers may look for people with gold nametags. These are members of the Membership Committee, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have been attending our services for a while and would like to join the society please see me or a member of the Membership Committee.

- Our time together continues with coffee, tea, and conversation after the service, and we invite you to join us.
- To parents – children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.
- Later in the service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and we hope that you will do so. It is optional, but we would like to give you a proper welcome.
- Since our Sunday services offer a variety of worship experiences, including ordained clergy as well as brilliant lay speakers, we encourage you to come back often.
- You may have noticed that we have a camcorder set up to record parts of today's service. Please be assured that Announcements, Joys and Sorrows, and Personal Reflections will not be recorded.
- So that we may maintain our spiritual space, please place your cell phone in a meditative state of being.
- The flowers this morning are given in honor of \_\_\_\_\_. Please consider making an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. You can sign up at the back table.
- Our fellowship time after the service is an important time for all of us, and food and drink always make that time ever so much more nourishing to the soul. Please sign up to bring and serve simple but wholesome snacks on the sign up sheet at the back table.
- Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service. I have these additional announcements:
- If there are any other MUUS related announcements, we ask that you line up to my left to share them now and please use the microphone.”

“Here end this morning's announcements.”

### **SOUNDING OF BELL**

And, now: I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this natural space in beauty & light. Take the next few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathe deeply. Relax. We welcome you into this place made more sacred by your presence.

*Sound bell . . .*

### **\* CHALICE LIGHTING & OPENING WORDS**

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown. Amen. ~ Sara Moores Campbell

\* **HYMN #52**     *“In Sweet Fields of Autumn”*

\* **COVENANT** (in unison)

*Love is the spirit of this society.  
Dwelling together in peace,  
Seeking truth,  
Helping one another,  
Serving human needs,  
Honoring the Earth and all that is,  
This is our covenant.*

#### **OFFERTORY**

And, with the words by The Rev. Richard Gilbert, we ask for your donations to sustain the very life-breath of this congregation and its members.

“Life is a brief interval between birth and death.  
May we celebrate the interval with joy;  
May we sing the song that belongs to us;  
May we act as if our very life dependent on it. [For] it does.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **REMEMBRANCE RITUAL**

This is the time of year, *when we reach out across time*, to remember loved ones who have died. This is our time for *connecting our spirits, connecting our souls, to loved ones lost*. In honor of loved ones, family members, friends, mentors, and others who have died, you are invited to bring forward a picture, flower, or other remembrance of that person.

**[SET UP TABLE IN ADVANCE TO ACCEPT PICTURES AND FLOWERS.]**

**RESPONSIVE READING #721** *“They Are With Us Still” by Kathleen McTigue*  
(congregation remains seated)

**[ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO NAME LOVED ONE’S NAMES AT END OF READING.]**

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<sup>1</sup> Editor, Patricia Frevert. **What We Share, Collected Meditations, Volume Two**. (Boston: Skinner House, 2002), 74.

### **SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS\*\***

"If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we'd like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a microphone."

PAUSE

***Let the congregation say, "Welcome!"***

As we begin the sharing of our joys and sorrows, please remember to tell us your name before sharing.

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

"Please wait for the microphone so that all will be able to hear."

### **INSERT SORROWS & JOYS**

Many joys and sorrows live in the heart, and we recognize their presence, even as they are offered in silence. Now our circle has been drawn larger. May we support one another with compassion and care. Amen

### **SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY**

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;  
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

### **PRAYER AND MEDITATION**

In Words

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

## HOMILY

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

These words, from Rev. Peter Morales, President, UUA<sup>2</sup>

"The Día de los Muertos is an annual November holiday that combines the Roman Catholic All Saints and All Souls days rituals with 2,000-year-old Mexican Indian traditions. Unlike Halloween, where the dead are seen as threatening, the Mexican holiday honors and remembers them with two days of feasting, processions, pageantry, and religious rites that sometimes include fireworks.

Preparations begin in mid-October, when markets and shops begin selling all sorts of paraphernalia: delicate paper cut-outs of skeletons called papel picado, decorated wreaths and crosses, sweetened breads, sugar or chocolate skulls, and macabre toys such as miniature coffins made of paper or wood and containing skeletons that sit up when a string is pulled. In rural Mexico the holiday involves placing the dead person's favorite foods, photographs, flowers, and mementos on a home altar. Many families also keep all-night, candlelight vigils in the graveyards where their dead are buried and attend open-air memorial masses. November 1 is commonly devoted to remembering infants and children, November 2 to remembering adults. Today, the tradition is enjoying something of a revival in Mexican American communities in the United States.

We sophisticated UUs are apt to see the Día de los Muertos as primitive or quaint. Surely, few of us share the cosmology of rural Mexicans who lay out favorite foods in memory of a dead relative. If I do this with my mother's favorite foods (maybe one of my aunt Amelia's wonderful Christmas tamales or her calabacita stew), I don't believe her spirit will return and be pleased at being remembered. Nor do I believe my mother will hear her favorite old Mexican tunes if I play a recording of them.

Yet if we dismiss the Day of the Dead as pure superstition, we can easily miss the profound spiritual and psychological insight that makes this tradition powerful. A Mexican boy spending the night at his uncle's grave has a connection across time with his forebears that our children do not. While we dwellers in a technological age are connected to the World Wide Web, cellular phones, and cable tv, have message machines, voice mail, pagers, and call waiting, we have cut ourselves off from the web of time. Traditional cultures, with their mediums and ghosts and reincarnations, have understood intuitively something we've repressed: the dead don't die; they live on.

I'm not speaking metaphysically or theologically. I'm talking about the very real stuff of memory, history, and molecular biology. Look in the mirror. The DNA of your ancestors is alive in you. Look at your children and grandchildren and see yourself and your

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uuworld.org/2000/0700feat3.html> October 30, 2009.

ancestors. Think of the decisions made by your parents and grandparents. Their choices shaped your life. And the choices we make every day shape the lives of those to come. The interconnections stretch across time.

This is what the Día de los Muertos reminds us of, and this is its power. A simple ceremony of remembrance puts us in touch with our place in time and our mortality, and it reminds us that to live is to create a legacy that endures for generations.

The Día de los Muertos rituals I have led--and the other UU Día de los Muertos rituals I know of--are quite modest and plain by comparison with Mexican observances of the holiday. The idea is not to mimic the Mexican tradition but to draw from its wisdom. [In the congregations I have served and visited,] I [have] witnessed . . . congregations deeply affected by [this] simple ceremony of remembrance . . . [I have seen] the power of taking time to feel our connection with those whose lives have helped shape ours.

Linda Ropes, president of the board at Jefferson Unitarian, recalls arriving at the service with deep misgivings. "I walked uneasily into the sanctuary that morning, clutching the photo of my 11-year-old daughter, unsure whether I wanted to revisit the pain that has gradually diminished since she died 15 years ago," she says. "Why open up old wounds? However, as president of the board of trustees, I am expected to attend as many church functions as possible, so there I was. I plunked down next to a fellow board member. We nodded cordially and retreated into our own thoughts."

But as the service began, continues Ropes, "The music and poetry were powerfully moving. Gradually, I was no longer alone with my grief, but part of a whole community of UUs who had also lost loved ones. We shared our sorrow by silently placing on the altar photos or mementos of those we had lost. I felt such a sense of community that it helped relieve some of the pain I felt. When I returned to my seat, I asked my fellow board member whose photo she had placed on the altar. 'My son,' she whispered, and explained how her child had died in an accident years ago. As she told her tale, she expanded from the board member who cared so fervently about social concerns to a grieving mother--just like me." After the service Ropes says she and her board colleague went up to the altar "arm in arm, . . . to view each other's children and stood and wept with dozens of other supportive people.

"Although I will no longer be serving on the board," she says, "I will be attending the service for the Day of the Dead next year."

Sue Saum, who played flute at [one] service, says the service deepened her relationship with another woman in her congregation. Saum, who had lost a daughter, learned that

her friend had lost a daughter also. "We have a connection we never would have had any other way," she says.

Saum adds that she also appreciates the way the Día de los Muertos tradition mixes grief and celebration. "So many parts of that tradition are loving and celebratory instead of terribly mournful and downhearted. It doesn't deny the grief, but it has this whole other part," she says.

In the last year I've learned that UUs in congregations across the continent are having similar experiences. The Día de los Muertos is quietly becoming a tradition in scores of our churches from California to Massachusetts.

Conducting the Día de los Muertos ceremonies has profoundly and permanently affected my view of Unitarian Universalists and my own sense of ministry. I now see there is a depth of feeling and passion just below the surface among us. We're united not just by abstract principles and lofty ideals but by memory, personal loss, and shared history. What is more, because the larger culture denies the reality of death and has little sense of history, a day of remembering our dead can be profoundly religious. When we allow ourselves to feel our place along the continuum of life and death, it moves us deeply. Facing death sharpens our sense of being alive and our connection to one another. And the dead help remind us of what is most meaningful and joyous in the world. Ultimately, then, the Día de los Muertos celebrates life."

May it be so.

PAUSE

**PERSONAL REFLECTION** (congregation)

*(In these moments we share a common responsibility to offer safe space for those reflecting on today's topic. We therefore encourage speakers to make "I" statements--speaking only for oneself--and to avoid language that is argumentative or critical of other viewpoints.)*

***Question to ponder: Have there been moments that you have felt a loved one's presence, even though they no longer live?***

\* **HYMN #96** "I Cannot Think of Them as Dead" (v.1-3)

**CONGREGATIONAL READING #688**

*"Hold On to What is Good" by Nancy Wood  
(congregation remains seated)*

**\* EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

"Please join hands for the extinguishing of the chalice."

"We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again. Let the congregation say AMEN."

Minister: The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, M.Div., M.A.  
Director of Religious Education: Denise Pedane  
Choir Director and Pianist: Charlie Batchelder

<sup>1</sup>As a courtesy to all gathered here today, please silence your cell phone.

\* Please rise in body or spirit.