



# Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic Traditions

1 CE Hour

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## Final Exam - PREVIEW

**Course Name:** Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic Traditions (1 CE Hour)

1. Currently, Hispanics are the largest minority in the United States: \_\_\_\_\_ of the total United States population in the 2013 census.
  - a. 38.7%
  - b. 29.4%
  - c. 21.6%
  - d. 17.1%
  
2. In the Hispanic tradition, the dead continue to play a role in the world of the living, and are generally \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Remembered with fondness and love
  - b. Feared and placated
  - c. Honored and worshipped
  - d. Spoken of in low voices
  
3. According to the CDC, leading causes of death in the Hispanic community include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Kidney failure
  - b. Heart disease
  - c. Suicide
  - d. Autoimmune diseases
  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ function much like prayer cards, in that they also display an image of a favored saint and a prayer to that saint.
  - a. Rosary beads
  - b. Funeral masses
  - c. Last rites
  - d. Votive candles

5. The body of the deceased plays an active role in the Hispanic tradition, from the wake and rosary to the funeral mass and burial, and is a central “actor” in the religious rituals remembering the dead. \_\_\_\_\_ is thus fairly common among Hispanics in the United States.
  - a. Green burial
  - b. Embalming
  - c. Closed-casket service
  - d. Cremation
  
6. Often, if permitted, Hispanic families like to hold \_\_\_\_\_, sometimes all night and during the hours leading to the funeral mass.
  - a. Prayer vigils
  - b. Rites of committal
  - c. Extended visitations
  - d. Private wakes
  
7. In total, funeral services generally last \_\_\_\_\_ days, followed by nine days of rosary prayers and regular commemorative masses for the dead.
  - a. Four to six
  - b. Three to four
  - c. Seven
  - d. Nine
  
8. Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Immediate family only
  - b. Immediate and extended family only
  - c. Immediate family and close personal friends only
  - d. The entire extended family in addition to friends and colleagues
  
9. According to E.R. Shapiro, grieving models in the Hispanic tradition emphasize \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A reintegration of the dead in a world without the deceased
  - b. A dismissal of the dead from the world of the living
  - c. Working through stages of detachment from the deceased
  - d. Minimal mourning and remembrance
  
10. Many traditional Hispanic remembrance practices are increasingly \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Limited to the immediate family
  - b. Focused on a belief in Hell as a possible outcome for the afterlife of the dead
  - c. Moving online
  - d. Exclusive and secular

# CONTINUING EDUCATION

## for Funeral Directors

### Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic Traditions

1 CE HOUR

#### Learning Objectives

This course is intended to increase funeral directors' awareness of, and sensitivity to, Hispanic cultural traditions with regard to grief and mourning. By the end of the course, learners should be familiar with:

- ❑ General demographics, language, and religious beliefs pertaining to Hispanic culture
- ❑ Hispanic attitudes towards sickness, dying, and the deceased
- ❑ Deathbed rituals and traditions in Hispanic culture
- ❑ Hispanic interment traditions
- ❑ Common Hispanic beliefs regarding the afterlife
- ❑ Hispanic mourning and remembrance rituals, including All Souls' Day and Dia de los Muertos
- ❑ Additional points of cultural sensitivity

## PLEASE NOTE:

The facts laid out in this module are presented as a general guideline to dominant cultural characteristics: they are not, and are not intended to be, applicable to all people of Hispanic origin. This module in no way diminishes the diversity of the many different Hispanic populations in the United States.

The integration of cultural characteristics into funeral practices is in part dependent on levels of acculturation, or the assimilation of Hispanic communities into local culture. Funeral directors need to be sensitive to the difference in Hispanic acculturation, with first generation Hispanics usually more traditional and more closely aligned with the cultural practices of their country of origin, while second, third and fourth generation Hispanic Americans may more closely reflect Anglo-American practices.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, generally Hispanic and Latino are terms that are used interchangeably, but Latino refers to those from Latin American, which includes Portuguese speaking Brazil, and the creole populations of Haiti and the Caribbean. This module addresses only the Spanish speaking population of Latin America.

You will want to ascertain the extent to which Hispanic patrons wish to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices, just as you would with any patron.

## Introduction: Demographics, Language, Religious Beliefs

The United States census states that Hispanics are those of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American descent regardless of ethnicity. However, Brazilians, who speak Portuguese, are not always classified as Hispanic, as Hispanic connotes one who is Spanish speaking. The Spanish used in various Hispanic countries can vary widely: the Spanish used in Mexico sounds very different from that used in Argentina or Cuba, with different terms for common items.

Currently, Hispanics are the largest minority in the United States: 17.1% of the total United States population in the 2013 census. This number is expected to grow; by 2060, it is estimated that Hispanics will make up 31% of the total population. California is the state with the highest number of Hispanics, at 14.7 million Spanish-speaking inhabitants; New Mexico has the largest percentage by population with 47.3 % of its total population of Hispanic origin. More than one-third of the total Hispanic population in the United States resides in states that border Mexico, including Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas.<sup>2</sup> Outside of the American Southwest, substantial Hispanic populations are found in the Northeast – in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut – and also in Illinois and Florida. Florida is expanding in growth because of its proximity to Latin America, while the other states are growing largely due to their urban centers and job availability.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, Hispanics practice Roman Catholicism; the specific

version is usually influenced by local indigenous cultures, resulting in Catholic folk practices that may seem very different from traditional European and American Catholicism. The Hispanic Catholic tradition embraces a rich plethora of saints and martyrs, although specifics can vary by location. Each country in Latin America, for example, tends to favor particular saints, martyrs, and icons depending on cultural values: in Mexico, for example, Saint Death – or Santa Muerte – is growing more popular, though she enjoys little to no recognition in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. With an estimated ten to twelve million followers, Saint Death ties together some traditional indigenous beliefs with Catholic thought, becoming known as the patron saint of healing, protection, and safe passage to the afterlife. Particularly favored by people on the margins of society, she is most notorious for being the preferred saint of drug cartel members, but is also popular with undocumented migrants, those of trans-gender, and others who perceive themselves as on the fringes. Despite – or perhaps because of – her steadily increasing following, Santa Muerte has been officially denounced by the Catholic Church because she is not a recognized saint from the Catholic canon.

Other saints popular with the Hispanic community include St.

### exam question...

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1 Whitaker et al, "Perinatal Grief in Latino Parents," <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3648338/> last accessed June 11, 2015.

2 <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/20/us/hispanics-in-the-u-s-/> last accessed May 8, 2015.

3 For individual state demographics see "State and County Databases, Latinos as Percent of Population, By State, 2011," <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/> last accessed May 25, 2015.

Peregrine, patron saint of cancer; St. Joseph, saint of the dying; Our Lady of Lourdes, the saint most often prayed to for various bodily ills; and Saint Juliana Falconieri, the saint of chronic illness. These are in addition to the popular figures of Sacred Heart Jesus (representing the heart that suffers, yet lives love more purely) and the Virgin Mary (who represents purity and suffering. Each country has its own particular favorite version of the Virgin that is popular; for example, in Mexico, the most popular Virgin Mary is the Virgin of Guadalupe, while in Argentina, the Virgin Mary of Lujan is the most revered). These saints and local variations of Jesus and Mary are important markers of cultural and ethnic identity, so it is important that they be acknowledged if one is to be sensitive to the specific Hispanic tradition. Statues and prayer cards with the pictures of these saints are often placed in the sickroom, along with candles (preferably electric, which can constantly “burn”), so that the saints may intercede on the behalf of the ill.

Though the majority of Hispanics are Catholic, Protestantism is growing in Latin America. Among Protestant Hispanics, Pentecostalism is the dominant branch practiced, with literal and evangelical interpretations of the Bible, and a rejection of Roman Catholicism. Additionally, some countries in Latin America (such as Argentina or Chile) are culturally or nationally Catholic, but have significant populations who are in fact non-observant, or non-practicing. However, many continue to adopt culturally Catholic traditions (the rejection of cremation in favor of burial, for instance), so important aspects of Hispanic Catholic traditions have been emphasized here.

## Attitudes towards Sickness, Dying, and the Deceased

In the Hispanic tradition, the dead continue to play a role in the world of the living, and are generally remembered with fondness and love (this is in stark contrast to European and American Protestant views that generally fear or avoid the dead). Dying is considered to be part of the cycle of life, and is accepted, though perhaps with some fatalism that is not found in contemporary American culture.

Hispanics, particularly in Latin America, often believe that illness is an emotional and/or social issue: one can become sick and die from being out of balance –

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4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hispanic or Latino Populations, <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/hispanic.html>, last accessed May 13, 2015.

5 “Reluctant Realism,” by Margaret R. McLean and Margaret A. Graham, <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v14n1/ellipse.html> last accessed May 13, 2015.

either with oneself or with one’s environment – and from the curses of others. For example, it is strongly believed that if a Hispanic woman does not satisfy her pregnancy cravings she will do damage to the baby, leading to injury, or even to the death of the infant. Nervousness is often attributed to an excess of bile in the bloodstream. In *susto*, or soul loss (which is associated with a wide variety of illnesses), it is generally thought that severe fright or worry causes one to disassociate with one’s soul, leading to chronic or severe illness and possibly death; the “cure” is returning to the place of separation from one’s soul and restoring unity with body and spirit. Belief in the “evil eye” (*mal de ojo*) is pervasive in Hispanic culture, and is often used to explain mysterious or sudden death. *Mal de ojo* is attributed to a person looking at another person with admiration or envy, causing a curse leading to sickness and/or death. Many people believe that infants, especially, are susceptible to evil eye, and thus it is not encouraged to overly admire a child, as it could lead to their early death or illness.

Because of these folk beliefs, Hispanics tend to be somewhat fatalistic in regards to illness and death – believing that there is nothing that one can personally do to prevent them – which can sometimes lead to a strong reliance on God and religious tradition in coping with both.

According to the CDC, leading causes of death in the Hispanic community are cancer, heart disease, unintentional injuries, stroke, diabetes, and chronic liver disease.<sup>4</sup> Though death itself is not a taboo topic in the Hispanic community, it has been noted that discussions regarding end of life care and the death process are frequently avoided; in sickness, many prefer to learn the “bad news” from a family member, rather than a doctor.<sup>5</sup>

Organ donation in the Hispanic community is viewed with a degree of skepticism, and generally Hispanics are far less likely to donate organs posthumously than their Caucasian counterparts (15% Hispanic donors vs. 63.8% Caucasian donors of all organs donated in

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2015).<sup>6</sup> It is generally believed that these low numbers are a result of both religious beliefs and a (correctly) perceived inequity of organ recipients: although Hispanics tend to be more in need of organ transplants than other ethnicities, Caucasian Americans top the list of organ recipients. Additionally, autopsy is generally frowned upon, and in fact, pre-planning funeral directors should be aware that many Hispanics believe that discussing events such as autopsy prior to death is believed to hasten death.<sup>7</sup>

## Deathbed Rituals and Traditions

As mentioned earlier, in the Hispanic tradition it is generally considered to be bad luck and in poor taste to talk of death in front of the sick – many believe this will hasten the death.

Some folk practices note that the spirits of those who die in hospitals can become confused or lost and have a difficult time finding their way in the afterlife; thus the dying patient is most often cared for in the home, if possible. (A general mistrust of the medical system, coupled with the high percentage of Hispanics who lack sufficient healthcare coverage (the CDC put the number in the United States at 29.1% in 2012, though these numbers will change under the Affordable Healthcare Act), have also contributed to the number of Hispanics who receive care at home rather than in the hospital.

Tending the sick or dying is generally regarded as the responsibility of female relatives (with the exception of pregnant women, who are not supposed to be around the dying as it is considered bad luck for the new baby and expectant mother). Additionally, both sickness and death are viewed as social events, and it is common for extended families to gather on these occasions.

Strong folk practices, mixed with Catholic saint reverence and a reliance on material relics (charms, candle lighting, amulets, etc.), generally characterize Hispanic practices surrounding sickness and dying. Depending on the illness and preference, small statues and charms of a favored saint will generally be placed near the dying person's bed, along with rosary beads, prayer cards, and candles, to offer comfort in the awareness of God's presence in the room with the afflicted. Prayer cards usually have a picture with a short prayer and blessing. Votive candles function much like prayer cards, in that they also display an

image of a favored saint and a prayer to that saint; when the candle is lit, many believe the patron saint is being called to offer protection and blessings on the room and the people in it.

Because the majority of Hispanics are Catholic, sickness and death are often viewed as tests of one's faith, and both anointing of the sick and last rites will be performed. These are two of Catholicism's seven sacraments, so their importance cannot be understated. Previous to Vatican II, anointing of the sick was almost exclusively considered the domain of near death and was given in conjunction with last rites; now it is more common to give these at two different times. Currently, anointing of the sick usually occurs when the sick person has been informed they are ill: the sick person's family and friends are invited to participate in a mass in which the sick person is blessed and a general prayer is made asking for God's blessing and healing on him or her. The last rites (or Extreme Unction), usually made at one's deathbed, consists of a blessing and a final confession if the person is still conscious; if not, then the person is forgiven assuming that they would have made the confession if they had been able.

After death, some families may wish to care for and tend the body of their deceased loved one, seeing this as an opportunity to offer love and respect one last time.

## Interment Traditions

The body of the deceased plays an active role in the Hispanic tradition, from the wake and rosary to the funeral mass and burial, and is a central "actor" in the religious rituals remembering the dead. Embalming is thus fairly common among Hispanics in the United States (it is not as common in Latin America, where frequently it is too great a financial burden). Though cremation is permitted, most Hispanics are buried, according to traditional Catholic beliefs that the body should be buried so that it may return to dust and be resurrected for its afterlife.

In Hispanic culture, it is common to hold a large wake or visitation with the extended family, children, and friends in attendance. Flowers and candles will be placed near the body where the visitation occurs. Usually food is brought to the wake: traditions vary dependent on culture and country, but often the foods serve to reinforce ethnic ties and identity. Sometimes

### exam question...

4. \_\_\_\_\_ function much like prayer cards, in that they also display an image of a favored saint and a prayer to that saint.
- Rosary beads
  - Funeral masses
  - Last rites
  - Votive candles

6 Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network [OPTN], Deceased Donors Recovered in the U.S. by Ethnicity, Last accessed May 14, 2015. <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/converge/latestData/rptData.asp> last accessed May 15, 2015

7 See "End of Life Care: The Latino Culture" <https://depts.washington.edu/pfes/PDFs/End%20of%20Life%20Care-Latino.pdf> last accessed May 25, 2015

there are even card games and tables for dominoes as the older members of the family sit, eat, play, and exchange stories about the deceased. The wake is not typically a quiet affair, and can often be a loud and emotional one: women in particular are generally allowed and expected to be expressive in their emotions, while men are stoic, but this is not always the case.

Often, if permitted, Hispanic families like to hold extended visitations, sometimes all night and during the hours leading to the funeral mass. Family and friends will also bring small gifts and tokens to place in the casket with the deceased, and thus many Hispanic families prefer to purchase caskets that come with memory drawers to hold photos, jewelry, and keepsakes, in addition to choosing cap panel inserts that allow for the insertion of photos, pictures and letters to the deceased.

Following a death, Catholics pray the rosary as a way to request the intercession of God on behalf of the deceased's soul: in other words, the rosary is intended to help the soul of the deceased secure their place in heaven. Rosaries are usually recited in the presence of the deceased the first and /or second night, and then continue to be recited for nine nights following the funeral at the home of the family of the deceased. This is generally followed by a rosary that is said once a month for a year following a death, and annually repeated after that. Reciting the rosary generally takes half an hour, though this depends on the speed of the prayers and the amount of time given to pause and reflect in between the prayers.

*The term "rosary" refers to both a form of devotion and the string of beads used for keeping count during the devotion.*

*The rosary (i.e. the string of beads) consists of a crucifix and five beads, attached to a string of fifty small beads, grouped into five groups of ten beads separated by five additional large beads. One prays various prayers while holding to each bead and moving through the beads in succession.*

*At each of the beads and at the crucifix, the petitioner prays a particular prayer, including the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer (Our Father), the Hail Mary prayer, and the Glory Be prayer, meditating on particular events that*

*occurred in the Bible (for specifics, see "How to Pray the Rosary" by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops).*

*The rosary (i.e. this set of prayers) is intended to help focus the petitioner's mind on particular events in the Bible, while utilizing prayer as a way to come closer to God.*

Following the wake and the rosary, there will also be a funeral mass, or requiem mass, to which the larger community of the deceased is invited and expected to attend (the obituary is often utilized in the Hispanic community to let family and friends know about the timing of this mass). The purpose of the funeral mass is not only the remembrance of the deceased; it is also considered a rite of worship. For this reason, funeral masses may only be performed by priests; however, the Rite of Committal (discussed below) may be performed by either Catholic deacons or chaplains since the Eucharist is not involved. Funeral masses consist of four parts – the receiving of the body, the liturgy, the Eucharist, and the final committal – and differ from traditional Catholic services in that they have no exchange of the peace.

Funeral masses may not conflict with other church holidays, and are not celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, Sundays during the Advent season (the preceding four Sundays prior to Christmas), Sundays during Lent (the forty days preceding Easter), and Sundays during Easter season (the fifty days following Easter). When a funeral mass must be celebrated on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent), this is permitted, but ashes will then not be distributed. When a mass cannot be celebrated, a Catholic funeral liturgy is offered for the deceased, consisting of readings, prayers and music. In general, only confirmed Catholics may read the readings or the prayers during a mass or liturgy.

Unlike wakes, which may be casual occasions, masses and funeral liturgies are much more formal and solemn affairs – they are religious services, after all, and usually take place in the church itself. The function of the funeral mass is to bring the deceased into the presence of God.

Eulogies generally occur during the wake before the funeral mass. Though some churches are now allowing

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- Green burial
  - Embalming
  - Closed-casket service
  - Cremation

6. Often, if permitted, Hispanic families like to hold \_\_\_\_\_, sometimes all night and during the hours leading to the funeral mass.
- Prayer vigils
  - Rites of committal
  - Extended visitations
  - Private wakes

family members to briefly remember the deceased following the Eucharist and before the final committal, opinions vary on this practice. Most traditional Hispanic Catholics still prefer not to allow families and friends to eulogize the deceased during the mass, as many believe it takes the focus away from the worship of God and praying for the intercession on behalf of the dead. (In contrast, Protestant Hispanics allow for the reflection and remembrance of the dead within the funeral service, and generally encourage the family and friends to share their thoughts on the deceased as a way to honor the dead. This is an important distinction between the Catholic and Protestant faiths, so funeral directors should be sensitive to this difference.)

If the deceased IS cremated rather than buried, s/he is generally cremated following the funeral mass – so that the body itself is present during the service – but prior to interment. (Again, this is in contrast to the Protestant tradition, which allows for cremation directly following the wake and prior to the funeral service itself; funeral directors should be aware of, and prepared to accommodate, both practices.)

Following the mass or service, the young men closest to the deceased (usually either family relations or close friends) will be asked to help carry the casket from the church to the hearse, and once again from the hearse to the burial site.

At the site of burial, if the family is Catholic, the Rite of Committal is performed, which consists mainly of a blessing of the interment site with a spoken prayer, the sprinkling of holy water, and a final blessing over the deceased. If the family is Protestant, a final prayer is recited, and a short text is sometimes read. Hispanic families generally accompany the deceased to his/her final resting spot; the extended community often will also participate in this aspect of disposal.

It is common practice to pass out prayer cards in remembrance of the dead at the funeral mass, to assist attendees in their prayers for the deceased. Often these contain a picture of the deceased, with their birth and death dates on one side and a prayer of intercession for their soul on the other.

In total, funeral services generally last three to four days, followed by nine days of rosary prayers and regular commemorative masses for the dead.

Frequently the funeral home must work in close

connection with the deceased's family's parish priest to arrange the wake, rosary, funeral mass, and blessing of the burial. Depending on the resources of the local church and the community, the church may host the majority of the events; in other cases events will be split, with the wake at the funeral home, followed by the rosary and/or mass at the church.

Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include the entire extended family network (including aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) in addition to friends and colleagues. Sickness and death in the Hispanic communities are viewed as social events, not merely private ones. Thus, wakes are seen as social occasions, and are usually viewed as opportunities to reassert the social structure without the deceased, while funeral services will likely be opportunities to stress one's social and blood relationship with the dead.

## Beliefs Regarding the Afterlife

The foundational views of the afterlife in the Hispanic worldview are informed by the Christian tradition; most often, that of the Roman Catholic Church.

As discussed briefly in the introduction, the majority of Hispanics are Catholic – if not in practice, then in culture – though there is also a rising Protestant population, particularly among Hispanic families that have resided in the United States for several generations.<sup>8</sup> In Latin America, the most influential Protestant denomination has been Pentecostalism; likewise, in the United States, the Hispanic Pentecostal population is growing. Many Pentecostals define themselves in opposition to Catholic practices, preferring a literal interpretation of scripture instead of the traditional practices of the Catholic Church, and rejecting prayers to the Virgin Mary. In addition to Catholicism and Protestantism, the Hispanic countries in the Afro-Caribbean region (Cuba, Dominican Republic, some parts of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Colombia, etc.) also incorporate traditional Afro-Caribbean beliefs and practices, sometimes practicing a syncretistic form of indigenous Catholicism.

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8 See Pew Research Center's surveys on "Religion in Latin America" for more on this: <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/chapter-3-religious-beliefs/> last accessed June 10, 2015.

### exam questions...

7. In total, funeral services generally last \_\_\_\_\_ days, followed by nine days of rosary prayers and regular commemorative masses for the dead.
- Four to six
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8. Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include \_\_\_\_\_.
- Immediate family only
  - Immediate and extended family only
  - Immediate family and close personal friends only
  - The entire extended family in addition to friends and colleagues

*Syncretism occurs when local indigenous beliefs mix with Catholic beliefs, forming new and often popular belief systems that may be more acceptable to the local tradition, but did not actually originate within the Catholic church. Saints and martyrs have traditionally been one way that the Catholic church has incorporated local and popular figures into the Church history and canon; in this way, the figure is no longer seen as competing for believers, but becomes incorporated into the Catholic church itself.*

Both Protestant and Catholic Hispanics believe in a final judgment: when one dies, the soul leaves the body to stand before God for a weighing of one's lifetime's worth of good and bad deeds. Based on this judgment, the soul is then sent to reside in either Heaven or in Hell; in addition, Catholicism provides for the in-between state of Purgatory. This singular belief informs nearly all the practices surrounding the care for and remembrance of the dead among Catholic Hispanics.

*Purgatory is a place where one's soul is sent if one's positive deeds do not necessarily outweigh the negatives ones (or, in theological terms, if one's sins are too great to go straight to Heaven). It is from the belief in purgatory that the practices of saying rosaries, celebrating masses for the dead, offering anniversary masses for the deceased, and observing the holidays of All Souls' Day and Dia de los Muertos emerge: all of these practices are meant to help the deceased move from purgatory into heaven, while also allowing the functional purpose of giving the bereaved something to actively do in honor of the dead.*

Protestants, on the other hand, assume the resurrection of the dead, though there is some debate over whether this occurs immediately following a death or whether it takes place at the end of time, with the second coming of Jesus Christ; in either case, the dead are not in need of assistance from the living (nor can they offer assistance to the living).

One of the big shifts in perception, particularly in the last hundred years, has been a decrease in the belief of Hell as a possible outcome for the afterlife of the dead, though Protestants tend to believe in Hell more than their Catholic counterparts.<sup>9</sup> This has led to decreased participation in funerary practices; if the bereaved believe their loved one has moved straight to Heaven, then there is little need to spend the time and/or

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  - A dismissal of the dead from the world of the living
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  - Minimal mourning and remembrance

money committing to rituals surrounding the dead.

Finally, though not officially sanctioned by the church, there is a popular belief in ghosts and spirits in Hispanic culture, with the deceased often actively invoked in both positive and negative forms. The most common form of ghost seems to be a woman who was spurned in some way in her life, and who comes back to take her revenge on the living: because much of Hispanic culture is a machista society, in which women are expected to observe traditional gender roles, this may be one way in which women are finally able to assert their power.

## Mourning and Remembrance

According to E.R. Shapiro, grieving models in the Hispanic tradition emphasize a reintegration of the dead in a world without the deceased, unlike the traditional Western/Anglo model of working through stages of detachment from the deceased.<sup>10</sup> Scholar Tony Walter calls this model a framework of mourning based on "caring for the dead," rather than "remembering the dead."<sup>11</sup> For this reason, most Hispanic traditions of mourning and remembrance involve the (passive or active) participation of the deceased themselves in addition to the involvement of the extended social family structure.

Death, then, is viewed in social terms; mourning encompasses the negotiation of, and restructuring of, social relations without the physical presence of the deceased. Immediately following the final interment of the body, extended family and friends usually retreat to the house of the immediate family of the deceased, where more food is brought, and remembrance of the deceased occurs. Food, flowers, and gifts of money to help cover the funeral expenses are the most common gifts given to the family at and following the funeral.

## Masses for the Dead

As mentioned above, unlike Protestantism – in which the resurrection of the deceased is emphasized – Catholicism encourages regular prayers for the deceased, particularly on significant dates following the death: while one might be morally certain of the deceased's place in heaven, masses help provide additional assurance through the prayers of the living.

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9 Ibid.

10 ER Shapiro. Grief in family and cultural context: Learning from Latino families. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*. 1995;1:159–176. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.1.2.159.

11 Tony Walter. "Communicating with the Dead," In C. Bryant & D. Peck, eds *Death and the Human Experience*, Sage 2009.

Towards this end, it is common to not only recite rosaries for the deceased, but to petition for masses to be dedicated in honor of the deceased. On anniversaries of the dead, or on the birthdays of the dead, some family members will recite rosaries for the dead and/or hold special remembrance masses in honor of the deceased. Thus, if the deceased is Catholic, usually one's family will honor the dead with masses on the third, seventh, and thirtieth days following a death or a funeral (the count of days begin with the day immediately following the date of death or the day of burial; both days are appropriate starting points), and then annually after that. Small stipends, usually \$5-10, are given to the priest to recite the mass. In addition, a card is often given to the family who has requested the mass for the dead: this card, somewhat like a greeting card, acknowledges that the deceased has had a mass recited in his/her honor. Prayer cards, similar to those passed out at the funeral mass, may also be handed out at anniversary masses.

### Individual Remembrances

In between masses for the dead, it is common practice to light a candle (with a small token payment) at the church in honor of the deceased, and to offer prayer in memory of the dead in this way.

Finally, it is common for both Protestant and Catholic Hispanics to place small notices in the local paper on the occasion of important anniversaries of a death (usually one, five, ten, fifteen, etc.), in which the family honors the deceased with a short message to and about him/her. If the family is Catholic, they may also announce the time and place of the anniversary mass. Often the messages are short but illuminating, and like obituaries, tend to privilege immediate family members and their relationship to the deceased.

Interestingly, many traditional Hispanic remembrance practices are increasingly moving online. As access to the Internet becomes universal, families are easily able to sign up for intercessory masses, request that candles be lit for them in prayer at churches (usually for a small donation), and post mass announcements and anniversary remembrances of the dead online. Funeral directors looking to extend their relationship with the family beyond the immediate death of an individual might want to make note of this custom and offer memorial notices as a service.

### Annual Remembrances

Apart from the annual anniversary of the death of the deceased, November 2, or All Souls' Day, is the most important regular remembrance of the dead, with Hispanic families – both Catholic and Protestant – gathering in homes, at gravesites, and in churches to remember the dead. (While Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is becoming widely known, it must be

stressed that this holiday is primarily a Mexican and Mexican American holiday; many Hispanic countries celebrate All Souls' Day, but not Dia de los Muertos. For this reason, these are both discussed here.)

## ALL SOULS' DAY

Originating in Catholic beliefs in Purgatory, and the need to intercede on behalf of the dead, the practice of observing All Souls' Day is first credited to St. Cluny, on November 2, 998. The observation of this practice soon spread to the rest of the Cluniac order, then to Southern Europe, and finally, in the fourteenth century, to Rome. Originally one day of intercession for the dead, it was not long before the November 2 observance expanded to encompass the entire month of November, with names of the deceased prayed over in masses for the dead and including October 31, All Saints' Eve, November 1, All Saints' Day, and November 2, All Souls' Day.

When the Spanish colonialists settled in Mexico in 1519, the Roman Catholic tradition was fused with indigenous Aztec tradition remembering the dead through reverence of the goddess Mictecacihuatl, known more contemporaneously as the Lady of the Dead. (The images of the Lady of the Dead are not that different from those of the Grim Reaper popular in Europe in the sixteenth century, with a similar emphasis on the macabre as an everyday occurrence: the reminder in both images is that of death made commonplace.) The indigenous summer holiday was moved to coincide with the later church date, and thus a new and indigenous interpretation of All Souls' Day was begun.

## DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

The Mexican Day of the Dead ceremony emerged from the popular Catholic practice of memorializing the dead in the Catholic Feast celebrating All Souls' Day. The overall purposes of Dia de los Muertos are to remind those who are alive that life is short, and to connect the living with the stories of the dead, specifying their continuing place in this world through narrative and the fixed location of the tomb. Thus, even those Mexicans and Mexican Americans who are Protestant may still participate in the cultural aspects of the Dia de los Muertos tradition, focusing on the

### exam question...

10. Many traditional Hispanic remembrance practices are increasingly \_\_\_\_\_.
- Limited to the immediate family
  - Focused on a belief in Hell as a possible outcome for the afterlife of the dead
  - Moving online
  - Exclusive and secular

parts of the holiday that emphasize Mexican heritage and culture.

History suggests that sugar skulls, so iconic to the celebration of the remembrance of the dead in Mexico, emerged from the socio-political landscape at the time. Abundant in sugar, but poor in capital, Mexicans wanted to adorn their churches with decorations similar to those popular with their colonialist conquerors; thus, they made use of sugar's malleable properties to make colorful and edible decorations for the church and home altars.

It is also common to bake Pan de Muerto, or Day of the Dead bread, made with flour, butter, sugar, eggs, orange peel, anise, and yeast. (These Pan de Muerto buns are not unlike the Hot Cross buns found in American Easter observances, down to the candied citron and decorations across the tops of the bread. Perhaps the yeast is symbolic of life's ultimate ability to overcome death; the rising of the bread, a symbolic reenactment of the resurrection of souls in the afterlife.) The bread is kneaded, then shaped into little buns, which are decorated with skull and crossbones laid across their tops. The Pan de Muerto and sugar skulls, along with oranges, are offered at the family altars along with pictures of the deceased and candles.

Marigold flowers often also adorn the graves, altars, and churches in remembrance of the dead: it is believed that the earth-tone colors help to guide the dead safely home.

In Mexico, the graveyards are publicly owned, and it is the community's responsibility to maintain them; because of its proximity to the church, the graveyard is often situated at the center of public space, making its maintenance doubly important. Church members and families come together to pull weeds and tend to the graves. Families bring chairs, tables, food, drink, flowers, candles, and pictures, feasting in the cemetery with extended family both alive and dead, spending the day telling stories about the dead family, saying prayers for the souls of the dead, and leaving offerings

of food, drink, and flowers.

In the United States, on the other hand, most graveyards are privately owned, and many set visiting hours. In response, Mexican Americans have trended towards setting up a home altar where the deceased may be honored via picture; the grave as the nexus of the social sphere has been relegated to the more private sphere of the nuclear family home. Thus, while Mexican American graves are still visited and maintained, they have not retained the same function as gravesites in Mexico, where the cemetery is both literally and figuratively the center of the world of the living and the dead.

## Additional Points of Cultural Sensitivity

- The family network in Hispanic culture is very important; generally the entire family prefers to be involved in decision-making. Be sure that all prominent family members are present so that problems do not arise regarding individual choices such as coffins, etc.
- Hispanic culture tends towards traditional gender roles and stereotypes: funeral service providers should be aware that this may impact grieving expectations and demonstrations.
- The concept of "Respeto" or respect cannot be understated: deference, particularly in regards to elders, should always be shown
- As covered earlier in this course, some Hispanic cultures believe in the power of the "Evil Eye." Funeral directors should be wary of overly complimenting children or babies, as their loved ones may fear that will bring misfortune and illness to them.
- Always use "Usted" if you are speaking Spanish to your clients; "Tu" is considered informal and should only be used with close friends and family.