MEMENTO MORI
A LIFE NIGHT ON DEATH AND JUDGMENT

GOAL

The goal of Memento Mori is to acknowledge the reality of death and judgment as a consequence of original sin but instill joy and hope in Jesus as our loving and merciful judge.

KEY CONCEPTS

• Jesus conquers the evil of death through His own death and Resurrection, giving us hope for eternal life.

• In Baptism, we die sacramentally with Jesus and are given the opportunity for new life in Him — physical death completes this process.

• Immediately after death, each person faces a particular judgment before Jesus; the result of our judgment — heaven, hell, or purgatory — is determined by faith in Him and the actions we have taken to live out our faith.

KEY TERMS:
Baptism
Eternal Life
Particular Judgment

SCRIPTURE:
Genesis 2:16-17
Hebrews 9:27
2 Timothy 1:9-10

CATECHISM:
1008
1010
1022
1036

ABOUT THIS LIFE NIGHT

This Life Night begins with a Gather activity in which teens create their own “memento mori” artwork using dirt paint. The Proclaim reflects on our strained relationship with time, which ends in death and a particular judgment. The Break gives teens time to create a bucket list geared toward a life with Christ. The Send is a prayer for a happy death.

ENVIRONMENT

For this Life Night, create an environment centered around time. Gather hourglasses and clocks to place around the room. Play a countdown or count up on a screen, and have clock sound effects in the background. On the walls, post quotes from saints and Catholic prayers about death. Use the following to get started:

• What is death but the burial of sin and the resurrection of goodness? (St. Ambrose)
• Now and at the hour of death. (The Hail Mary)
• Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. (The Lord’s Prayer)
• The sting of death is extinguished in Christ. (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, aka Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI)
• Memento mori. (ancient Christian saying)
• Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Ash Wednesday liturgy; Genesis 3:19)

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Mandy Mathy: “Speed Countdown Digital Clock 60 sec ( v 177 ) TIMER with sound effects HD” (youtube.com)

Randall’s Rest & Relaxation: “Clock Sound Effect = 12 Hours of Grandfather Clock Tic Toc Pendulum Sound Of Clock Noise” (youtube.com)

Theresa Aletheia: “Memento Mori” (spotify.com)
SOCIAL MEDIA HASHTAGS:
#LT_MementoMori

AS YOU GET STARTED...

For a more successful Gather, consider making works of “memento mori” art at a Core Team meeting before the Life Night. This gives everyone an experience of making the dirt paint before the Gather and gives the teens ideas as they begin their own designs.

For a Gather with a larger group, consider playing minute to win it games using the hourglass timers around the room. Game ideas are found online by searching “minute to win it games for teens.”

For a parish suffering from a tragic death, consider scheduling the crisis Life Night When It’s Dark after Memento Mori. If this death was the result of depression and suicide, consider referring to the issue Life Night Fear vs. Dreams.

HISPANIC INCULTURATION
By Stephanie Espinoza
Contributors: Juan Aznaran, Angie Marino

Important Notes for Pastoral Care
While celebrations like Día de los Muertos and the cultural Catholicism of places like Mexico and Central America foster a joyful and respectful view of death, there are certain regions that have taken views toward death too far. Devotion to “la Santa Muerte” or “Saint Death” has recently grown, especially through the prevalence of drug cartel-related media that often depicts the skeletal female figure, but has been officially condemned by the Vatican. This cult movement worshipping death has trickled its way into well-meaning Hispanic/Latino Catholic homes under the veil of it being a recourse for those seeking protection from the law — which explains its popularity with drug lords but also has made it a kind of “patron saint” for undocumented Catholics in the United States. For some the devotion is as minimal as displaying an image of “la Santa Muerte” in their home, while for others it involves occasional or regular participation in the so-called prayers and practices surrounding the cult. Because it so subtly confuses traditional Catholic sentiments surrounding death, most take part in it without realizing its dangerous proximity to satanic spirituality.

Be sure to clearly express to the teens that the “Santa Muerte” devotion is condemned by the Church and has no place in the life of a Catholic. If you attain knowledge that there are families of your teens who have any affiliation with this devotion, consider involving your pastor in a conversation with them in order to determine the intensity of the devotion, to help remove it from their lives, and to gain awareness of any negative consequences that might result from the exposure to it.

Cultural Insights
A first generation or recently arrived Hispanic teen may not know what is meant by a bucket list, so be sure to take a moment to explain that at the start of the Break. Be aware that the items might look differently for these teens as well — where a typical teen might include things like playing in the NFL, becoming a doctor, or going to law school, an immigrant teen might list things like obtaining permanent residency for their parents, graduating high school, or helping pay bills in their home.

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LIFE NIGHT: MEMENTO MORI

GATHER

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)
Gather teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the Life Night, introduce any teens or Core Members attending for the first time, and begin in prayer.

Dirt Painting (25 min)
Divide the teens into small groups of six to eight with one Core Member in each group. Provide each group with the following: a bowl, flour, salt, water, black Tempera paint, coffee grounds, and the Dirt Paint Instructions handout. Handouts are found on the May 2018 Life Teen USB and online at lifeteen.com under Life Support: May 2018. Provide thick parchment paper or thin 12”x12” sheets of plywood for each teen.

Have each teen create a “memento mori” work of art with the dirt paint. Introduce the activity using the following:

In Genesis 3:19, God tells Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We are reminded of this passage every year on Ash Wednesday as we receive ashes on our forehead. During this Life Night, we will learn the benefit of reflecting on the reality of death. Right now, we are going to create a piece of art to serve as this reminder for us. Using the dirt paint, draw a skull and somehow incorporate the words “memento mori” in your drawing.

PROCLAIM

“Memento Mori” Teaching (15 min)
The Proclaim Outline and Proclaim Details can be found on pages 18 to 24.

BREAK

Bucket List (20 min)
Divide the teens into small groups of six to eight with one Core Member in each group. Begin the small group with a prayer, and then pass out the Bucket List handout. Handouts can be found on the May 2018 Life Teen USB and online at lifeteen.com under Life Support: May 2018. Explain the activity using the following:

A bucket list is an intentional list of goals, adventures, dreams, and achievements one wants to complete before death. Many times, it includes things that are only geared toward worldly achievements and goods. Right now, we are going to re-envision our bucket list to focus on those things that prepare us for eternal life. The experience of God’s creation, and most especially our day to day life, can lead us to God, so don’t exclude places you want to travel or personal goals for a job or education. Instead, try to see them in the context of your relationship with God. Using your handout, take some time to create a personal bucket list that embraces life in a way that prepares you for life with Him in eternity.

Once teens have finished their bucket list, use the following questions to facilitate discussion:

• What is one thing on your bucket list that you are most excited about? How can it orient your life toward God?
• Spend time sharing any other goals or dreams on the bucket list.
• Goals and dreams often take time to achieve. As time passes, some of our goals and dreams will remain the same while others will evolve and change. With this in mind, how can we keep eternity at the forefront of this process?
• Why is death a fearful and difficult reality to face? Lead the teens to the conclusion that we are made for life, which is offered to us by God through our baptism.
• What are some concrete things you can do to die to yourself each day?
• How can the phrase “memento mori” prepare you for eternity?

SEND

Prayer for a Happy Death (10 min)
Gather the teens into the main meeting space and have a few teens share a couple of things on their bucket list. Challenge all the teens to implement the practice of memento mori by placing their dirt art in a prominent place or finding something else to serve as reminder of their death. Then, project the following prayer to pray together:

O God, great and omnipotent judge of the living and the dead, we are to appear before you after this short life to render an account of our works. Give us the grace to prepare for our last hour by a devout and holy life, and protect us against a sudden and unprovided death. Let us remember our frailty and mortality, that we may always live in the ways of your commandments. Teach us to “watch and pray” (Luke 21:36), that when your summons comes for our departure from this world, we may go forth to meet you, experience a merciful judgment, and rejoice in everlasting happiness. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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MEMENTO MORI

KEY TERMS

Baptism: The first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification.

Eternal Life: Living forever with God in the happiness of heaven, entered after death by the souls of those who die in the grace and friendship of God.

Particular Judgment: The eternal retribution received by each soul at the moment of death, in accordance with that person’s faith and works.

TEACHING POINTS

TIME AND ETERNITY

• Ask the teens if they have experienced a moment where time seems to stand still, and ask a few to share this experience with the large group.
• Our relationship with time is a strained one. In certain moments, time feels as if it stops. In others, there never seems to be enough.
• We often see time as an enemy, but if we embrace life as God intends, time can become a great friend.
• Look at an hourglass. It serves as a reminder that our time is limited but also points to the fact that our time goes somewhere. The sand does not disappear but is stored for the future. How we spend our time now is an investment in who we will be in our lifetime and where we will spend eternity.

MEMENTO MORI

• Memento mori is an ancient Latin phrase which means “remember your death,” or “remember that you have to die.” It is a long suggested practice to help order our time in this life.
• Death is a tough reality for all of us, though. God never intended for us to suffer it; we experience death as a result of sin. Whether or not we place our hope in Christ, it is a painful event.

HOPE IN GRIEF

• By dying on the cross, Christ transformed death into something that works for our good. We take part in His new plan for death through the Sacrament of Baptism.
• In Baptism, we die with Christ sacramentally, and physical death completes the process of our new life with Him.

PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

• At the moment of death, we are immediately judged by Jesus Christ. The result of our judgment — heaven, hell, or purgatory — is determined by faith in Him and the actions we have taken to live out our faith.
• The truth of our immediate judgment should inspire a healthy fear in us — the realization that it is possible to spend eternity without God.

DIE EVERYDAY

• Practices of sacrifice and service are actually practices of death. They are not just nice things to do when we have the time or required hours to clock for school, Confirmation class, or a resume.
• We are dying to ourselves, to our own desires, and placing someone else before us. These small deaths are incredible preparation for the moment we breathe our last breath, the moment we leave time behind and enter into the natural state we were created for — eternity.
Time is such an interesting thing. In certain moments, it feels as if it stops. In others, there never seems to be enough. C.S. Lewis, a famous Christian author, wrote to a friend and said the following of time:

“Consider projecting the quote as you read it.

“If we complain of time and take such joy in the seemingly timeless moment, what does that suggest? It suggests that we have not always been or will not always be purely temporal creatures. It suggests that we were created for eternity. Not only are we harried by time, we seem unable, despite a thousand generations, even to get used to it. We are always amazed by it — how fast it goes, how slowly it goes, how much of it is gone. Where, we cry, has the time gone? We aren’t adapted to it, not at home in it. If that is so, it may appear as a proof, or at least a powerful suggestion, that eternity exists and is our home.”

A Severe Mercy by Sheldon Vanauken

Ask the teens to share an experience they have had where time seemed to stand still.

Our relationship with time is a strained one. On the one hand, we act as if we have as much of it as we want. We are careless with it and make hazardous choices, an attitude that coined the phrase, “You only live once.” At certain points, though, we spend life grasping at time, worrying about how little we have — when you have a test the next day, a friend visiting from out of town, or a family member on their deathbed. We often see time as an enemy.

However, if we embrace life as God intends, time can become a great friend. Look at an hourglass. We flip it over, most often while playing a game, and immediately watch the top half — the sand running out. Rarely, though, do we focus on the place it goes. An hourglass does serve as a reminder that our time is limited, but it also points to the fact that our time goes somewhere. The sand does not disappear but is stored for the future. How we spend our time now is an investment in who we will be in our lifetime and where we will spend eternity. How do you spend your time? Do you live your life to store up for your time with God in eternity?

**MEMENTO MORI**

*Memento mori* is an ancient Latin phrase, which means “remember your death,” or “remember that you have to die.” It is a long suggested practice to help order our time in this life. It is represented in the history of art as a skeleton, skull, or hourglass. In the Church, we celebrate All Souls Day, *Día de los Muertos*, and feasts of saints on the day they died. Quite often, we hear phrases during Mass or in prayers linked to preparation for death.

*Refer to the phrases posted around the room, and ask the teens if they can think of any others.*

Death is a very difficult reality for all of us, though. God never intended for us to suffer it; we experience death as a result of sin. Whether or not we place our hope in Christ, it is a painful event.

Some of you may have dealt with the expected or unexpected death of family members and friends. Unfortunately, we may experience the shock of a tragic accident involving students at our school or in our community. The topic of death may be very sensitive for you right now, or you are struggling to see God’s goodness because of it. Sometimes, well-intentioned people try to bring comfort with phrases such as “It was God’s will,” or “Everything happens for a reason.” It can make the sting of death and our grief worse because
God seems to be the cause of such terrible pain in our lives. It is important not to dismiss the burden of death because it is not what God intended; in a sense, it is not natural.

**HOPE IN GRIEF**

In order to reveal God’s intent, Christ enters into the terrible experience of death Himself. By dying on the cross, He transforms death into something that works for our good. We are able to take part in His new plan for death through the Sacrament of Baptism.

*Philippians 1:21*

When we are baptized, we are dunked or sprinkled with holy water. It is an action meant to represent death. We die to our old self, who is stained with original sin and unable to enter into the Kingdom of God, and become His adopted son or daughter. We now have the opportunity to share in His divine life for all of eternity. In Baptism, we die with Christ sacramentally, and physical death completes the process of our new life with Him.

*CCC 1010, 2 Timothy 2:11*

The gift of Baptism offers us hope and transforms something so ugly into the most beautiful moment we can experience as a Christian. It is proof that God goes to every length to make His divine life possible for us. As we learn to trust in His plan and timing for our life, we also have to trust that we will each experience death at a moment that is perfect for our salvation.

Notice, however, that Baptism only offers us an opportunity for eternal life. It is not magic or a ticket we pull out of our wallet at death. It requires our cooperation. We are still responsible for living our life in a way that the grace of the sacrament can flourish and grow in us.

*CCC 978*

The practice of *memento mori* is arguably the best way to take up that responsibility. It might seem a bit depressing or strange. It may be difficult because of fear or the freshness of grief from a loss, but remembering our death leads us to life. As Christians, it leads us deeper into the hope of the Resurrection, a reality that fully unites us with God and reunites us with those we love. By remembering our death, we can orient our temporary lives toward life beyond death.

**PARTICULAR JUDGMENT**

For many reasons, there is a lot of confusion regarding what happens when we die.

*Ask the teens to share different ideas of life after death.*

The Church teaches that all experience a particular judgment at the moment of death. We are immediately judged by Jesus Christ, who opened the gates of heaven for us through His death and Resurrection. The result of our judgment is determined by our faith in Christ and how we expressed that faith during our life. We are judged on how we served God in the people around us. We are judged by the kind of daughter or son, sister or brother, spouse, and neighbor we were throughout our life. We are judged by the mercy we offered when we were hurt or offended, and the mercy we seek for ourselves.


Many people and world religions have different ideas about what happens to us when we die. We know, through Christ and His Church, what happens. We will not become an angel or ghost. We will not be sent back to Earth to re-experience life as a cow or a king. We will not receive our own planet or even cease to exist. We will instantly see our life measured by Christ’s. Immediately, or through a period of purification, we will enter the joy of heaven or immediately enter the eternal suffering of hell.
The truth of our immediate judgment after death should inspire a healthy fear in us. Healthy fear is not a crippling fear; it is the realization that it is possible to spend eternity without God. It is even considered one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit — Fear of the Lord. It pushes us to seek His will every day and to live a vibrant and heroic life of service and sacrifice.

DIE EVERYDAY

When we think about it, practices of sacrifice and service are actually practices of death. They are not just nice things to do when we have time or required hours to clock for school, Confirmation class, or a resume. We are dying to ourselves, to our own desires, and placing someone else before us. It can be done in the smallest actions. We can allow our sibling to choose the show or movie to watch or put our phone down to have a conversation with our parents or a friend in need.

_List other ways the teens at your particular parish can sacrifice and serve others._

These small deaths are incredible preparation for the moment we breathe our last breath, the moment we leave time behind and enter into the natural state we were created for — eternity.

In the next three Life Nights, we are discussing the different states in which our souls can enter after death. Initially, it may be difficult to to explore these Church teachings. They will challenge each of us to evaluate the way we are currently living, but the process will also lead us to claim and experience Christ’s victory and the freedom it can unleash in our hearts and lives.