

Confronting death

INQUIRING MINDS EVENT OFFERS ACTIVITIES CENTRED AROUND SUBJECT OF DYING

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Tiptoeing around death is as natural as dying itself.

The many euphemisms used in western culture to broach the subject, without actually tackling it head-on, are a measure of how people avoid conversations about pushing up daisies, biting the dust, kicking the bucket, or buying the farm — take your pick.

But for a group of curious individuals, death without the veneer is the main topic of discussion at a series of events happening in Crescentwood.

"This is something that is present and palpable for each one of us and our dominant culture teaches us not to talk about it," said Meghann Robern, reverend of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg.

"How would our lives be made better because we can talk about this thing that is a shared experience for each of us?" she said.

The Unitarian Universalist church is hosting its first Inquiring Minds event, titled Dialogue on Death, from Oct. 26 to Nov. 3 at 603 Wellington Cres. The program of activities and speakers is mostly free to attend and open to the public. Events include a resource fair with support groups, agencies and businesses; death cafes (informal group-led conversations on death, dying, and grief); a panel discussion on interfaith perspectives on death; and workshops on greener death options, medical assistance in dying, memorial planning, and communication strategies, and more.

Liz Redston, a member at First Unitarian Universalist and project co-ordinator lead for Inquiring Minds: Dialogue on Death, said the congregation had previously hosted death cafes in association with Community Death Care Manitoba and the response from community members encouraged them to explore the topic in greater depth.

"People really do want a dialogue on death," she said. "The more we looked the more we found, and the more sort of enthusiasm we heard from people.

"People wanted more opportunity to learn how to communicate about death, dying and grief, and they wanted hands-on learning," Redston said.

The dialogue series also coincides with a number of religious and spiritual traditions related to death and dying, Robern noted.

"We have the Neopagan holiday of Samhain, which is also known as Halloween from a secular perspective. From the Neopagan perspective it's a holy day between the fall equinox and winter solstice... It's a day considered when the veil between the worlds is very thin.

"The mythology stories that are told around it are meant to lead you into a personal human experience. And then on the other side of it is a very universalist holy day which is All Souls Day," Robern said.

"There are these two perfect death, ancestor-related holidays... to be the two points in which we would explore these things during the week."

At the core of the event series is a conversation about legacy, tradition, ancestors, and how to inherit stories and memories and move into the future together, Robern said.

"One of the things that we can offer to the community is the space to say, this is hard to talk about and here's a place to dig a little deeper, and make your life better," she said.

"We hope people will come to this and find an outlet for themselves to speak about death, dying and grief in a safe way," Redston added.

"And that they will leave feeling a greater ability in talking about death, dying and grief with others."

More information is available at www.uuwinnipeg.mb.ca/news/inquiring-minds-event-calendar

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