

Chaplaincy Update | Burial of the Unclaimed Service

On December 8, 2022 we laid to rest 1624 people who had died in 2019 at an Interfaith Burial Service. These are people who died within the bounds of Los Angeles County three years ago, but no one has come forward to claim their remains. There are probably 1624 reasons for this - sometimes loved ones live too far away, or people are cut off from their family or perhaps the family can't afford a burial for their beloved.

Los Angeles County has held this service every year since 1896. The county burial site is nestled on a sun-soaked corner of Evergreen Cemetery. Supervisors Janice Hahn and Holly Mitchell, DHS Director Dr. Christina Ghaly and a circle of



representatives from various faith and cultural traditions remembered the people who have died with inspiring words, prayers, blessings and chants. As the Presbyterian Staff Chaplain at LAC+USC Medical Center, it was my honor to be in that circle.

When it came time to lay the flowers on the 2019 grave, memories of the patients that I have accompanied, many of them without family or shelter, flooded my heart. I wondered how many of my patients were laid to rest that day. Somehow the graveside became the bedside and I saw our hands held in prayer, the tears spilling down a cheek, eyes full of fear, a beaming smile and faces full of peace.



Christ always precedes me when I make my visits to the bedside, and you, faithful members of Christ's church in the Presbyteries of Pacific, San Fernando, Los Ranchos and San Gabriel (with special thanks to San Marino Community Church) and the Synod of Southern California - you make it possible for the sick and the poor, the injured and the infirm to be reminded of God's love and mercy. As a witness to God's enduring love, we claim them as family.

Thank you!

Chaplain Elizabeth

The Burial Service for the Unclaimed was closed to the public this year, but if you would like to watch the video you can find it here <https://www.facebook.com/lacusmedical>. We are hoping that it will be offered as a hybrid experience in 2023.

To find out more about Presbyterian Chaplaincy at LAC+USC Medical Center or how you or your church can be more involved, please contact Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder at Elizabeth.GibbsZehnder@gmail.com

-Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder serves as Presbyterian staff chaplain at LAC+USC Medical Center. The Presbyterian Chaplaincy is made possible through the Consortium funded by the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, the Presbyteries of Los Ranchos, Pacific, San Fernando and San Gabriel (with special thanks to San Marino Community Church).