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EarthBeat
Filipinos light candles in front of the tomb of their deceased loved one, inside a military ceme

Filipinos light candles in front of the tomb of their deceased loved one, inside a military cemetery near Manila, Philippines, Oct. 31, 2015. Filipinos flock to cemeteries across the country to commemorate their departed loved ones for All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. (CNS photo/Romeo Ranoco, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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Environmentalists are urging the millions of Catholics who flock to cemeteries on All Souls' Day to take only biodegradable materials.

Traditionally for the Nov. 2 feast, Filipinos camp out in cemeteries, eating and drinking with the entire family, reported ucanews.com.

"We urge our fellow Christians to be mindful of the environment during our visit to the graves of our deceased relatives and loved ones. We know everyone is excited, but let us be mindful of the waste we will leave in the cemetery," Jovert Donglao, executive director of Group for the Environment, told ucanews.com.

"Perhaps many of us want to do what we had failed to do because of the pandemic. We want to party in the cemetery, to be with our loved ones, both living and the dead. But we can help both by reducing our waste by not partying in cemeteries, if

possible," Donglao added.

The environmental group launched a national donation drive to gather more than 5,000 trash bins to be distributed in public cemeteries in the Philippines. The project aimed for visitors to separate their waste into biodegradable and nonbiodegradable trash.

"When people see trash cans, the temptation to throw away garbage anywhere is reduced, if not removed," Donglao told ucanews.com.

The church's social arm, Caritas, also raised concerns about waste management in the country's Catholic cemeteries on All Souls' Day.

Caritas urged Filipinos to minimize their trash to preserve the sacredness of the cemeteries.

"We appeal to our fellow Filipinos to make this year's observance of All Souls' Day different from the pre-pandemic celebrations, which were marred by tons of garbage left by cemetery visitors and vendors," Fr. Tony Labiao, Caritas executive secretary, told ucanews.com.

The priest said every Filipino has the obligation to be responsible and to take care of the environment for the sake of future generations.

"It's our shared responsibility to ensure that our environment, which includes us all, is protected against practices that pollute and degrade it," he added.

In 2019, more than 13 million people visited cemeteries throughout the nation, according to the Philippines Information Agency.

The number drastically decreased in 2020 because of the lockdowns brought about by the pandemic.

Dr. Peter Ruzgal of the Department of Health told ucanews.com that, during the pandemic, government guidelines on group gatherings resulted in Filipinos not congregating, to avoid superspreader events.

"The pandemic taught us to be more careful, not only for ourselves but for our loved ones with comorbidities. The pandemic is not over yet," Ruzgal added.

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