



Hispanic Heritage Month

September 15 - October 15

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: *(Begin with a brief silence to center and be present.)*

Let us begin by quieting our minds.

Sit comfortably and at ease.

Let your body be at rest and breathe naturally.

Take several full breaths and let each release gently.

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I calm my mind.

Now, shift awareness from your breath. For a moment, imagine that you are sitting at a table. Sitting right beside you is a woman or a man of Hispanic descent. Who might this person be? Is this person a scholar, a community leader, a musician, a dancer, a writer, an artist, a theologian, or an activist? Does this person have a name? Engage in conversation with him or her. What can you learn from him or her? How different are you from him or her? Do you share the same dreams? Hopes? Fears? If you don't know a specific name, reflect on the richness of Hispanic culture.

(Pause for a moment of silence. If time permits, invite participants to name the person(s) with whom they engaged in conversation.)

God of all peoples, our Hispanic sisters and brothers have shaped and strengthened our nation. As we gather to commemorate National Hispanic Heritage Month, we are mindful that they mirror your beauty, goodness, and an unshakable belief that all are welcome at your table. Let us listen to the word of God.

Instructions

This prayer service in remembrance of Hispanic Heritage Month calls for a leader to lead and participate in the service. The leader will need to find nine other readers prior to the service.

- The beginning of the service invites participants to “sit” with a Hispanic person who has inspired them. After the scripture reading, brief biographical sketches should be voiced by the readers, who are selected and assigned before the service begins.
- At the designated times noted in the prayer service, light a candle to show how far-reaching these leaders’ lights have shone in the lives of others.
- Near the end of the service, the leader will lead the group in one final reflection.

Preparation: Recruit nine readers to assist the leader, gather four candles and matches, arrange for live or recorded instrumental music (e.g., marimba, guitar).

Scripture Reading: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah (43:1-4):

“Hear the word of YHWH—the one who created you, the One who fashioned you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. I am YHWH, your God. You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you” *(The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation, 2007).*



LITANY OF HISPANIC LEADERS AND PEACEMAKERS

(Have instrumental music playing in the background, preferably Mexican.)

Female Reader 1: My name is [Dolores Huerta](#) and I am a labor union administrator. In the 1950s, I began teaching in a farm worker community and witnessed the brutal poverty surrounding my students. In 1966, I co-founded the United Farm Workers Union with fellow labor leader and advocate César Chávez. I organized the members and, through non-violent tactics, mounted a successful boycott of California table grapes. My goal in life was to empower farm workers with information and skills to help them secure better living and working conditions.

Male Reader 1: My name is [Mario José Molina-Pasquel Henríquez](#). As a chemist at the University of California at Berkeley in 1973, I began, with Sherwood Rowland, to research chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which were used in refrigerators, spray cans, and cleaning solvents at that time. We discovered that the release of CFCs could destroy the ozone layer in the stratosphere, leading to an increase of harmful ultraviolet light, which could cause skin cancer. Our research led to a ban of CFCs in most countries, and we received the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for our work.

Female Reader 1: My name is [Jovita Idár](#). As a journalist in 1911, I reported on discrimination against Mexican children and the lynchings of Mexicans by the Texas Rangers law enforcement unit, for my father's newspaper, *La Crónica*. I co-founded La Liga Femenil Mexicanista (The League of Mexican Women) and was its first president. I formed free schools for Mexican children and provided necessities for the poor. During the Mexican Revolution, I organized La Cruz Blanca (White Cross) to nurse the wounded on both sides.

Male Reader 1: My name is [Ernesto Galarza](#) and I am a labor organizer, historian, professor, and activist. At the age of eight, I migrated with my parents to Sacramento, California, where I worked as a farm laborer. I did very well in school and received an M.A. from Stanford in 1929, and a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University in 1944. After graduating from Columbia, I returned to California where, at the height of the Cold War and McCarthyism, I organized unions for farm laborers. I joined the effort to create the first multiracial farm worker union. I wrote several books, most notably the 1964 "Merchants of Labor," on the exploitation of Mexican contract workers, and the 1971 "Barrio Boy," about my own childhood. I was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976.

Female and Male Read in Unison: We celebrate their ability to lead and to serve as positive role models, and their service as reminders that education, dialogue, and faith can rid our world of poverty, hunger, and disease. *(Light candle.)*

Female Reader 2: I was the first female Hispanic astronaut. In 1993, I served on a nine-day mission aboard the shuttle Discovery. My name is [Ellen Ochoa](#). On my mission, we conducted atmospheric and solar studies to understand better the effects of solar activity on Earth's climate. We also studied damage done to Earth's ozone layer. I became a pioneer of spacecraft technology and an inventor. My inventions include optical recognition systems, computer hardware, and robots to refine images from space. At the NASA Ames Research Center, I led a research group working primarily on optical systems for automated space exploration. I am the director of the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Texas.



Male Reader 2: My name is [César E. Chávez](#) and I was a leader of farm workers in the western United States. Like many of my ancestors, I worked the land with my hands. I saw how my people were treated unjustly. Using strikes, fasts, picketing, and nonviolent marches, I obtained contracts from a number of major growers. In 1966, together with Dolores Huerta, I formed the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. We launched a 1968 boycott against the table grape growers, mobilizing consumer support throughout the United States. In 1972, under my presidency, the UFW became a member union of the AFL-CIO. I expanded the union's efforts to include all California vegetable pickers and launched a lettuce boycott. I also extended my organizational efforts to Florida citrus workers.

Female Reader 2: Born in Cuba, I immigrated to New York in 1967, and continued my work of performing, directing, conducting and composing music. My name is [Tania Justina León](#). I directed and conducted the musical "The Wiz" on Broadway and "Dance in America" for public television. I was a composer for the New York Philharmonic and combined gospel, jazz, Latin and African elements in my music. In 1994, I started the Sounds of the Americas festival. My opera "Scourge of Hyacinths" based on the life of Nobel Prize-winner dramatist Wole Soyinka, premiered in 1994 and won the BMW Prize for Best Composition at Munich Biennale for New Music Theater.

Female and Male Read in Unison: We celebrate their courage to dream and to break down barriers of discrimination, injustice, inequality and sexism. (*Light candle.*)

Male Reader 3: My evocative literary works are steeped in the land and life of my native Southwest. My name is [Rudolfo Anaya](#). The first of my seven novels, "Bless Me, Ultima" (1972), a coming-of-age story set in 1940s New Mexico, is considered a classic of modern Chicano and American literature. I also brought my writing skills and knack for storytelling to essays, children's books, plays, poetry, and the 1998 mystery "Shaman Winter." I am a professor emeritus of English at the University of New Mexico.

Female Reader 3: My name is [Sonia María Sotomayor](#). I have been an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court since 2009. I was born to a Puerto Rican family in the South Bronx. My father died when I was nine, leaving my mother to care for my younger brother and me. Driven by a strong work ethic, I attended Princeton University and Yale Law School. I began my judicial career in 1992 when President George H.W. Bush appointed me to the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. While there, I issued an injunction against Major League Baseball owners ending the longest work stoppage in professional sports history. I participated in more than 3,000 legal decisions and have worked tirelessly to honor the Constitution, the rule of law, and justice. In 2009, President Barack Obama made me the first Latina to serve on the Supreme Court.

Male Reader 3: I played my entire major league baseball career with the Pittsburgh Pirates (1955-72) and was a key part of their success in those years. My name is [Roberto Walker Clemente](#). I reached the 3,000-hit plateau in 1972. I was one of the most respected and feared right fielders to play the game. I had a lifetime batting average of .317 and hit 240 home runs. I died in an airplane crash while attempting to take food and medicine to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.



Female Reader 3: I worked for women's suffrage in New Mexico from 1914 to 1920. My name is [Adelina \(Nina\) Otero-Warren](#). I became superintendent of public schools in Santa Fe County in 1918. As superintendent, I made improvements in rural schools. During WWI, I worked with the Red Cross. In 1921, I ran for Congress and lost. After my unsuccessful run, I was appointed Inspector of Indian Schools in Santa Fe County in 1923 and was able to improve education for Native Americans.

Female and Male Read in Unison: We celebrate their resolve to pass down the rituals and rich heritage from one generation to the next. (*Light candle.*)

Female Reader 4: My name is [Joan Chandos Báez](#). I am an American folk singer and political activist. My music career began with singing traditional folk ballads, blues, and spirituals in Cambridge, Mass., coffeehouses. I was influential in making folk music popular in America. My records were the first folk albums to become best-sellers. Among the first performers to urge social protest, I sang "We Shall Overcome" at the March on Washington in 1963. In addition to supporting civil and student rights, I have participated in the antiwar movement. Since the late 1960s, I have been devoted to nonviolence and have performed at concerts supporting a variety of humanitarian causes.

Male Reader 4: My name is [Alberto Alonso](#) and I was born in Havana, Cuba. I was a dancer, ballet master, and choreographer. I founded the National Ballet of Cuba with my brother and sister-in-law in 1948. I became the master artist in residence at Santa Fe Community College and resident dance choreographer at Santa Fe Dance Theater. I am best known internationally for my work "Carmen Suite" in 1967. It was the first role created for Bolshoi Ballet dancer Maya Plisetskaya. My style was considered controversial in the late 1960s but it has endured.

Female Reader 4: My name is [Judith Francisca Baca](#). I am an artist who was determined to give all people a voice in public art and urban culture. I organized more than 1,000 young people in Los Angeles to create more than 250 murals citywide. My massive works of art brought together young people from different ethnic neighborhoods to explore their cultural histories and make connections to their lives today. Since 1987, I have been creating an enormous portable mural called the "World Wall" to promote global peace.

Female and Male Read in Unison: We celebrate their ability to promote peace and nonviolence through dance and music. And, in their voices and movement, we see and hear God in action. (*Light candle.*)

Leader: We celebrate the immeasurable contributions that countless Hispanic women and men have made to the United States from its inception to its latest chapters. We give thanks for their profound and positive influence on our country through their strong commitment to family, faith, hard work, and service. Day after day, they enhance and shape our national character with centuries-old traditions that reflect the multiethnic and multicultural customs of their community. (*Light candle.*)



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What Gospel values do you see in the lives of these Hispanic leaders? After discovering the accomplishments of these influential Hispanics, who stood out for you? Why? Has this changed your views on the Hispanic community?
- What lessons can we learn from their lives? How can you let your light shine and be a role model for others?
- Do you see the differences between cultures as a barrier to learning from them? Do you think these barriers generate a sense of cooperation or competitiveness? Do they create a sense of fear or reinforce negative stereotypes? Why or why not?
- Do you feel part of a global community living in solidarity with others? Have you reflected and taken pride in your heritage as much as these influential people take in theirs?
- How have you interacted with people of different cultures? How can you reach out?
- Reflect on the commonalities that you shared. Was there something in your personal, family, or faith life that prevented you from celebrating the successes of different cultures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: God, you are the God of acceptance and love.
We come from different places, externally and internally.

Our journeys have not been the same, but we share the Gospel dream
That all are born with the right to food, housing, health, education,
And a right to live free of discrimination, hatred and fear.

Through the prophet, Isaiah, you remind us that each of us is called by name
And that we are precious in your eyes.

Help us to mirror unity and diversity and to create welcoming spaces
Where people can tell their stories and be heard.

May we be open to learning from those who think, speak, write,
And dance differently.

Continue to grant us the courage to change those parts of ourselves that
Impede us from being your presence in a society where greed, competitiveness,
And indifference prevail.

We have much to learn from our Hispanic sisters and brothers of yesterday
And today.

May we learn from their examples and model authentic justice and equality.

We ask this in your Son's name, the One who invites us to be voices of challenge
And a people of movement and change. Amen.

