

Shrine pays tribute to migrants

BY DAVID AGREN
The News

As Día de Muertos observers around the country honored deceased loved ones on Thursday, residents of one town in the State of Mexico focused their attention on those who passed away far from home.

At the Parish of the Divine Savior church in Malinalco, community members constructed a Day of the Dead shrine to pay tribute to local residents who died while in pursuit of economic opportunities in the United States. On Wednesday night, several hundred locals gathered for a Mass and placed photos of relatives on the shrine.

"The impulse to give a public recognition, a public Mass, [exists] because there is not any sharing of this experience in the community," said Ellen Calmus, director of El Rincón, an organization that provides crisis support for the families of migrants.

"We thought this would be a healing thing."

Although emigration has been a decades-long reality in many towns, cities and states across the country, large-scale emigration from Malinalco only started five years ago, Calmus said.

Most of the migrants who leave the mountain town, she said, "go to earn a little money and then come home."

But some never make it to the United States, or even home. The lack of a migration tradition poses particular problems for Malinalco residents working north of the border, Calmus said.

In states with a long history of migration, she explained, many of those heading north are privy to word-of-mouth advice from friends or family members and can take advantage of support networks run by people with ties to their hometown. Malinalco residents have no such networks to tap into, Calmus said.

Many of the deceased migrants from Malinalco were killed in highway accidents, said Calmus, who was unable to put a number on the total death tally.