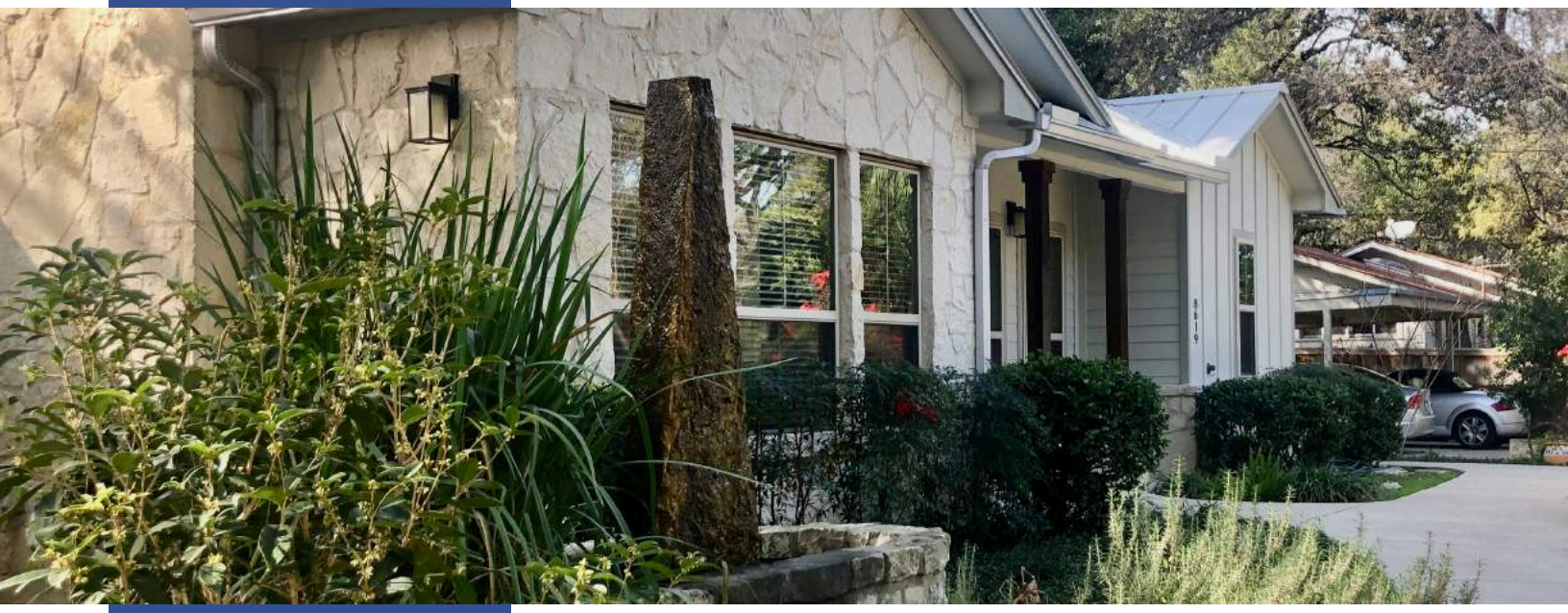
ABODE

CONTEMPLATIVE
CARE FOR THE DYING

NEWS From Home

WINTER 2021 | ABODEHOME.ORG

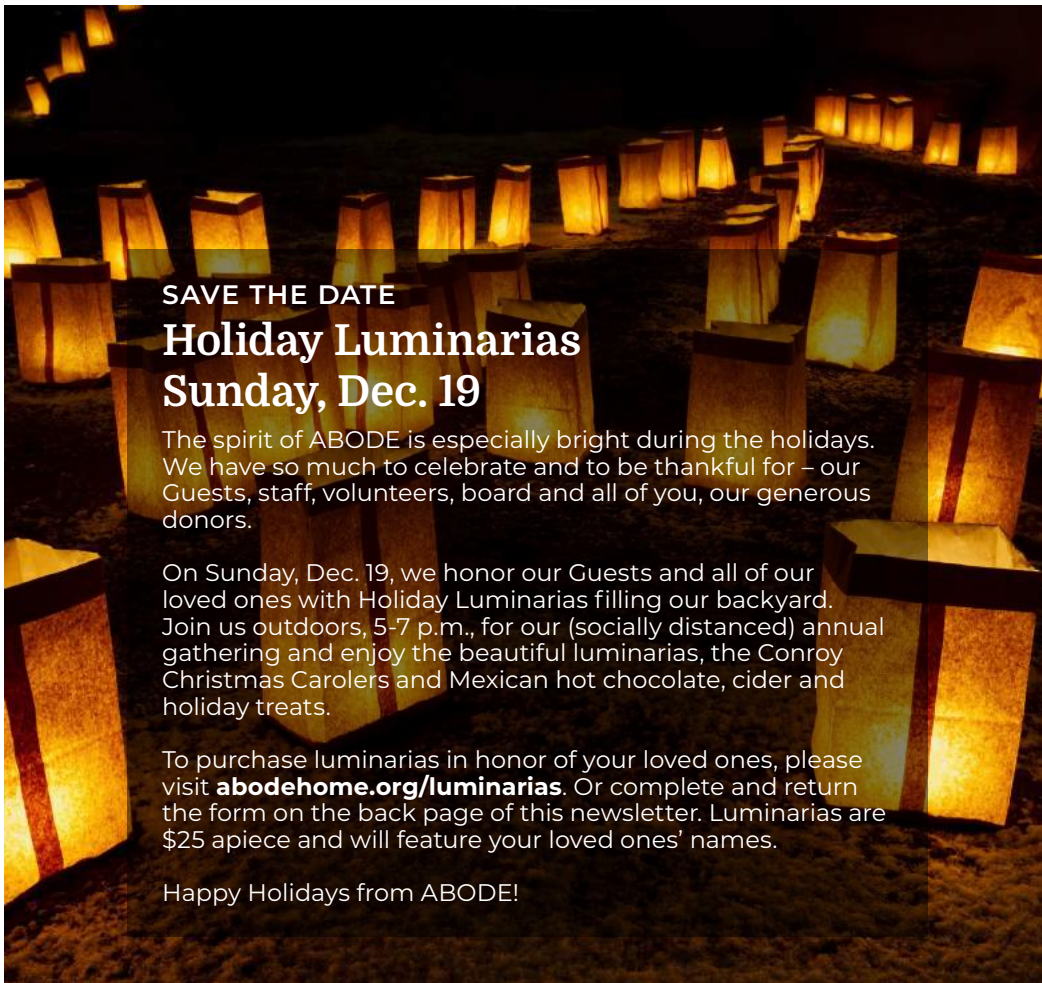


Our Mission

ABODE is Home. We offer compassionate, interfaith and spiritual care in a contemplative community so those who are dying leave this world with dignity and grace. We teach the art of contemplative living and dying.

Our Vision

We live in a world where death is not feared, and we live fully until we die.



SAVE THE DATE

Holiday Luminarias Sunday, Dec. 19

The spirit of ABODE is especially bright during the holidays. We have so much to celebrate and to be thankful for – our Guests, staff, volunteers, board and all of you, our generous donors.

On Sunday, Dec. 19, we honor our Guests and all of our loved ones with Holiday Luminarias filling our backyard. Join us outdoors, 5-7 p.m., for our (socially distanced) annual gathering and enjoy the beautiful luminarias, the Conroy Christmas Carolers and Mexican hot chocolate, cider and holiday treats.

To purchase luminarias in honor of your loved ones, please visit **abodehome.org/luminarias**. Or complete and return the form on the back page of this newsletter. Luminarias are $25 apiece and will feature your loved ones' names.

Happy Holidays from ABODE!

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Mary Thorsby

The end of the year is an exceptionally beautiful time at ABODE. The cool air invites us to keep our windows open. Our Guests enjoy time outdoors on their patios. And lately, the Monarch butterflies are swarming our butterfly garden. What a treat.

We're especially happy to report that our volunteers – longtime and new – have returned to the house, helping us carry out our mission, vision and values every day. Our recent Staff and Volunteer Training was a big success – see page 6 for photos.

A Beautiful, Peaceful, Happily Ever After

Each Guest comes to us with such a unique story. This year, we've cared for folks from such wide-ranging backgrounds. Some have family and friends. Some don't. Some have lived very long and fulfilling lives. Some lives are cut terribly short by cancer and other illness. For some, death comes quite peacefully and easily. For others, we sit with them day after day, holding their hands, praying, singing and meditating – in essence, walking with them as they complete their journeys.

The common thread that they all share is the love, warmth and peace that they find by spending their last months, weeks and even days with us. Through the work we do, we're able to change people's lives – even at the end of their lives.

Perhaps one of the best testaments we've received is from Mindi Acord, who shared her experiences as we cared for her mom, Christine:

"It was hard moving mom from a home she'd lived in for 60 years. But we got to ABODE and saw how beautiful it was. She'd never lived in a place this nice. At ABODE, she was surrounded by people who loved her. They didn't just care for her – *they cared about her.* And I was able to fully focus on being her daughter and not her caretaker.

"The people at ABODE became the core of my support system. The grounds at ABODE became a refuge where I could just go and calm down. I spent countless days looking at the butterflies, birds and squirrels. And Milo *(our ABODE pooch)* was a mind reader. He knew exactly when I needed a little comfort…or maybe he was looking for food, I'm not sure which!

"When mom couldn't read her Bible any longer, the staff and volunteers were always at her side, reading devotions and singing hymns. Through countless conversations with staff and volunteers at ABODE, I started to see that death wasn't scary. It's a natural part of life. It doesn't have to be tragic.

"I'm blessed that I got to watch my mom transition from this life to the next. ABODE gave her a beautiful, peaceful, happily ever after that she otherwise wouldn't have had."

And we were so blessed to care for Christine. Thank you, Mindi, for sharing her with us.

We Surpassed Our Goal!

Your Love + Support
Are what make the beauty of ABODE possible. We are deeply grateful.

big give

A Big Give Thank You

Many, many thanks for your gifts during San Antonio's Big Give campaign. With your help, we not only met our $50,000 goal – we surpassed it by $700! We are very grateful to you all.

Several donors have expressed interest in making a gift of appreciated stock to us. We'd be delighted to accept! In fact, we've set up a brokerage account to make these kinds of transactions quick and easy. Email **info@abodehome.org** if you'd like more information.

God's Waiting Room

One of our Board members, Christus Hospice Nurse Beverly Tuomala (shown in the photo with Christine, above left), calls ABODE "God's Waiting Room." It's a beautiful waiting room, tended by four of the loveliest angels we know.

Our End of Life Navigators Sarah, Claudia, Diana and John not only focus on our Guests' physical needs, they attend to their emotional and spiritual needs, as well. Their contemplative approach to care ensures that everyone who comes through our doors – including families, friends, hospice teams and more – feels welcomed, valued and celebrated.

Leading Our Way Forward

We are deeply appreciative of our Board of Directors, led by Board President Robert Soza, for their wise counsel, tireless support, innovative ideas and wonderful resources and community connections.

Robert Soza
Jackson Walker

Roxanna Soza
Community Leader

Guy Acerra
Ameriprise

Peg Armstrong
Grief/Bereavement Psychotherapist

Carol Bertsch
Law Offices of Carol Bertsch

Kathryn Eggerss RN
H-E-B

Rich Ferguson MD
Hospice Physician

Karen Lugar
Cornerstone Home Lending

Rigo Montero
Embrace Hospice

Lynn Perez
Toyota Manufacturing

Beverly Tuomala RN
Christus Hospice

Our monthly meetings are a wonderful mix of brainstorming, strategy and a healthy dose of humor. Thank you all so much for your commitment to ABODE. We've made such great strides this year.

Come See Us, Masked Friends!

Our home is your home. If you haven't visited us at 8619 Post Oak Lane lately, please give us a call at 210-967-9891, grab your mask and stop by. If you can join us for our Sunday, Dec. 19 Holiday Luminarias, all the better. More details at **abodehome.org/luminarias**.

Thank you for a wonderful 2021. We wish you a very warm and love-filled holiday season and an even more exciting new year.

Mary Thorsby
Executive Director
mary@abodehome.org
415-271-4974
Tax ID #27-3691295

PS: If you haven't yet made your end-of-year tax-deductible gift – or if you need another one or two – we would be very grateful if you'd consider ABODE: **abodehome.org/donate**.

Educational Outreach It's Part of Our Mission

Along with offering compassionate care to our Guests, ABODE's mission includes teaching the art of contemplative living and dying. Our Education initiatives do exactly that, and we invite you to participate in any and all going forward.

Here's what we have planned:

Monday Meditation with Edwin Sasek: Meets on Zoom 5-6 pm on Mondays.

Thursday Meditation with Ed Alderette: Meets on Zoom and in person at ABODE 11 am on Thursdays, followed by lunch.

ABODE Book Club & Study Group: We'll be reading Frank Ostaseski's *Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living*. Meets 6:30-7:30 pm, Tuesdays, starting Jan. 18.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers: This evidence-based program provides much-needed support to help caregivers remember to care for ourselves so that we can better care for our loved ones. We'll begin a new group in February.

ABODE Academy 4: Our six-week program is set for 6:30-7:30 p.m., Thursdays, starting Feb. 17. For more details, look for ABODE Academy under our Education tab on **abodehome.org**. You'll find previous ABODE Academy recordings there, as well.

Life After Loss Grief Support: We'll begin a new group in March.

Interested in any (or all) of the above? Please email **info@abodehome.org**.

Our Guests, Our Hearts

David

David and Milo have become big buddies – and it could be because David sneaks him treats! David recently celebrated his birthday here, with about 25 family members gathering on his patio outside his room at ABODE for barbecue, carrot cake, presents, storytelling, laughter and so much love – for each other and for David.

As we move through our lives, it's so heartwarming to celebrate every milestone with those we love and those who love us back.

Sandy

At ABODE, our hearts are extra touched when we can care for our veterans – especially one as beautiful as Sandy. Sandy was a colonel in the Air Force – an Air Force nurse, in fact. She spent her career as a researcher and leader in the nursing field, having managed the Air Force nurse education program and published numerous papers.

Her friends said she brought out the best in them – and in everyone she met. We could feel that. Sandy's sweet spirit filled not just our Blue Room, but our whole house. Her sister barely left her side and was with her when she took her last breath.

We will keep both Sandy and her sister in our hearts.

Minnie

There's nothing like the love between a grandmother and her grandson. Minnie was one of our Guests who came to ABODE – and improved!

And that's not just because of our care. Her family, including her grandson Marcus, visited her daily, bringing her special surprises and showering her with love. She recently returned home to be cared for by her family full time. We loved having her cheerful humor with us.

Dwight

Dwight came to us on a Friday morning after being sent to respite care when it was clear he could no longer live by himself. He was all alone in this world – no friends and no family. He could no longer navigate the stairs up to his second floor apartment, and he wouldn't accept much help from any service.

He did agree to come to ABODE, though, and we were able to show him love and compassion – and clean him up as he prepared for this final journey.

He died the next night, with our End of Life Navigator Diana sharing a prayer and one of his Embrace Hospice nurses by his side.

Everyone needs a little help, especially at end of life. We were happy to be here for Dwight.

Linda

Linda came to us after battling cancer for 8 long and painful years. That's our wonderful End of Life Navigator Sarah Lee with her.

Linda's husband and daughter spent many hours by her side, reading to her – she loved literature – and focusing on their love for her in these final days. They were with Linda when she took her final breath.

We were honored to care for her. Rest In Peace, Linda.

Gordon

Gordon came to us after a series of falls that, along with other conditions, led him to his final stretch of life. We cared for him for just a few days until he took his last breath, quietly and peacefully. That's one of our volunteers, Ed Alderette, sitting with Gordon, a day before he passed.

Gordon was a minister and choir director. His family gathered and sang to him in four-part harmony – a wonderful and touching moment along his final journey.

We were honored to care for Gordon, and we're sure he's already directing a special choir above.

James

James came to us quite unresponsive – in fact, we thought he'd pass quite quickly. His daughter, shown here with him, had prepared herself to say her final goodbye. Yet, a day or so later, he woke up!

We just never know how our Guests' experiences will change from hour to hour, minute to minute. We are happy to continue to care for James as his end of life journey continues.

Janet, Raymond and Linda

Within the past few weeks, we've cared for – and said goodbye to – Janet and Raymond. Both Guests were with us for less than a week, and they both died quietly and peacefully. Janet's son and daughter were by her side when she took her last breath.

We then welcomed Linda to ABODE. Linda arrived in quite a bit of pain. With the careful, loving attention of Christus Hospice and our own staff, we alleviated her discomfort, and we're happy to see that she is now able to get some much-needed rest. We are honored to care for Linda in her final stretch of life.

Follow Along with Our Guest Stories

We often share Guest stories at **@ABODEcontemplativecare** on Facebook, **@abodecontemplativecare** on Instagram and **@abodecare** on Twitter. Give us a follow and some "love" and please share our posts with your followers.

To receive our e-newsletter, please look for the newsletter sign up section on our home page at **abodehome.org**. We're eager to share our news with you – and if you've got related news, we can share that, too. It's all about community here at ABODE.

THERE'S STILL TIME TO GET THAT END-OF-YEAR-TAX DEDUCTION

If you're looking to fill that Gifts to Charity line on your tax form, we'd be delighted if you'd consider ABODE. You can still get your end-of-year tax deduction – or a couple of them! – by sending a check, calling with your credit card or donating directly at **abodehome.org/donate**. We'll provide you with a receipt – and our sincere gratitude.

ABODE Training Such a Great Success!

Kindness and enthusiasm filled Brown Hall at the Church of Reconciliation as staff, board members, volunteers and supporters gathered, Nov. 12 and 13, for our content-rich and action-packed ABODE Training Program.

We heard from Co-Founders Patsy and Edwin Sasek about our history, Executive Director Mary Thorsby on how ABODE works along with lessons learned in the field of death care, Volunteer Coordinator Susan Ruch on all the wonderful opportunities to lend a hand and Board Member Beverly Tuomala on *The Dying Process: Things You Were "Dying" to Know.* We do have a sense of humor here at ABODE!

Board President Robert Soza kicked off the training, inviting folks to place meaningful items on our communal altar. Peg Armstrong shared how to "be" with the dying, calling on what she learned while studying under Mother Teresa.

We also learned how to turn someone in bed, change a diaper and even how to make up a bed with someone in it. And we all received brand-new ABODE Training Manuals.

Among the favorite takeaways:

"That presence and being open and listening is of upmost importance."

"This training made me realize more how finite life on earth is."

"I like knowing that I am not 'morbid' for wanting to assist the dying and trying to make their last days, weeks or months as comfortable and joyful as possible."

No ABODE event is complete without food from FrankieB Catering and wine from Scout & Cellar! Many thanks to everyone for your support.

If you didn't get to attend but you're still interested in volunteering, please reach out to **susan@abodehome.org**. We'd love to have you!

Photos by Sue Johnson

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP AT AMAZON SMILE

Here's a way to do holiday shopping that gives twice. When you shop via **smile.amazon.com** instead of amazon.com, you can select ABODE Contemplative Care for the Dying as your beneficiary and Amazon will donate a portion of your purchase directly to us. You'll find all the same great items – and an easy way to support our work. Happy holidays and happy shopping!

Dia de los Muertos Celebration Brunch

What a great Dia de los Muertos celebration among our ABODE Community! So many people came by to pick up their beautifully decorated Frankie B Catering brunch boxes and Scout & Cellar wine donated by Judy Tierney. The Threshold Singers serenaded us throughout our Zoom program. We built a virtual ofrenda and read each name of those who have died at ABODE in the past 12 months. And we celebrated many ABODE milestones.

On behalf of ABODE, thank you all so very much for spending this special time with us. And many thanks to all of our volunteers who helped us make this event so successful – and to H-E-B for financial support.

Photos by Sue Johnson

We are so grateful to have you as part of our community. Your support helps us do what we do best – caring for those at a time when they need us most.

SCOUT&CELLAR WINE CONSULTANT

H-E-B

HouseHolder Perks

Our Dia de los Muertos event also honors our HouseHolders – those of you who make regularly monthly, quarterly and annual gifts to ABODE. We are so grateful for you – and to show our appreciation, we have a few new gifts to offer you:

- Use of our backyard for a private gathering

- Brother Cletus poster and set of greeting cards
- Private coffee hour for you and five friends/colleagues at ABODE

- Complimentary virtual or in-person Scout & Cellar wine tasting events for you and up to 15 friends, plus $20 gift card with any wine club purchase

- 20 percent discount at **nikkimay.com/shop**
- ABODE Fiesta pin
- Coffee or something more festive with ED Mary Thorsby

If you happen to have products or services that you'd like to offer our HouseHolders, please send an email to **mary@abodehome.org**. We're always looking for great ways to share our appreciation for our supporters.

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NON PROFIT ORG
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SAN ANTONIO, TX
PERMIT NO 572

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Liz Newhouse
Edwin Sasek
Patsy Sasek
Hal Smarkola
Rev. Judith Rhodes
Susan Ruch
Peter Szarmach
Denise Miner-Williams
Jane Marie Young

Holiday Luminaria Order Form

Would you like to honor your loved ones with Holiday Luminarias? We invite you to order online: **abodehome.org/luminarias**

Or, mail this form and your check payable to ABODE to:

ABODE Contemplative Care for the Dying
P.O. Box 47640, San Antonio, TX 78265

Luminarias are $25 each.

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

I'm honoring:

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Pre-orders accepted through Saturday, Dec. 18.

Questions? Please contact Mary Thorsby, **mary@abodehome.org** or 415-271-4974.