

# THE CATHOLIC PARISH CEMETERY

VOL 1 ISSUE 1

Meeting Challenges *e* Recognizing Opportunities

## Why? For whom?

Approximately 4,300 Catholic parishes in the United States have responsibility for close to 6,500 smaller cemeteries. These cemeteries are open/closed and may be maintained, abandoned, or minimally attended. Some date to the early 1700s and many, if not most, were established in the 1800s thru the early 1900s.

There are secular/religious, national, state, and regional cemetery organizations, but most small Catholic cemeteries don't belong and benefit from cemetery news, development tips, and advertisements by numerous vendors who offer products and services that make management, operations, development and maintenance much easier.

This newsletter is the first American attempt to close that communications gap. It intends to establish communication with pastors, parish and cemetery managers/sextons, finance councils, cemetery boards and hundreds if not thousands of parish cemetery volunteers. It is intended for pastoral ministers, pastoral associates as well as those who teach either in Catholic schools or religious education programs.

The **Catholic cemetery apostolate** has radically changed since the close of the Second Vatican Council more than 50 years ago. Prior to 1966, the Catholic cemetery was disciplinary and admission required baptism, parish membership, marriage in the church, Easter duty, and a life free from scandal.

In 1985 a **Mission Statement for Catholic Cemeteries** was introduced. It was guided by the Second Vatican Council and the

**1983 Revised Code of Canon Law**. Versions of that original **Mission Statement** appear in several **Toolbox for Parish Cemeteries** manuals. The statement reoriented the purpose of the Catholic cemetery away from discipline to ministerial service under the umbrella of **paraclesis** (comfort), **catechesis** (teaching Catholics what the church believes about death and life after death), and **evangelization** (teaching these same beliefs to those who are not members of the Catholic church).

This newsletter is intended to break open that **Mission Statement** into the wealth of implications that may not have been available to all the groups listed above.

The newsletter will be published three times each year, February, June and October, beginning with this June issue. It is free to the 4,300 parishes through the generous support of those who advertise within it. An electronic version will also be available, but will require registration so that notification can be made when a new issue is published.

All readers are encouraged to check out the web sites of the vendors who have been generous in supporting this new endeavor. You'll find products/services that should make your pastoral ministry through the cemetery easier and more beneficial to those you serve.

Finally, the newsletter is also intended as a vehicle to promote The **Toolbox for Parish Cemeteries**, a collection of six manuals that provide the latest, most comprehensive information on administration, operation, maintenance, sales, and financial aspects of Catholic parish cemeteries. Information on **The Toolbox** is also found at [www.sankovich.com](http://www.sankovich.com) and an order form is always included in this newsletter.

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Father Mychal Judge, OFM Cap, is listed as the first casualty of the 9/11 attack on the NYC World Trade Center; he was ministering in his capacity as a chaplain to one of the NYC Fire Stations. He is pictured at St. Joseph Parish Cemetery in Lyndhurst, NJ where he visits with a cemetery employee. Mychal recognized the catechetical and evangelizing opportunities as both teacher and learner and this remembrance will hopefully encourage priests and other pastoral leaders to follow his lead.

[ Sign up for an electronic version of *The Catholic Parish Cemetery Newsletter* at: [www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com](http://www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com) ]

# Parish integration

Is the parish cemetery integrated into the life of your parish? Has your parish been redefined and become part of another? Does a new parish configuration now have responsibility for 2 or more parish cemeteries? Significant numbers of parishes now have multiple cemeteries, i.e. 4,300 parishes with 6,500 or more parish cemeteries.

**Some realities to consider:** the parish cemetery does more than bury the dead and assure maintenance of interment sites. The Catholic cemetery bears witness to and teaches what the church believes about life, death, life after death. The parish cemetery holds the history of the parish community.

Is your parish cemetery open or closed? Are some of the cemeteries for which your new parish configuration has responsibility full, in disrepair, a long distance from the new worship site and parish office? Unfortunately, many parish cemeteries are without sufficient care funds or other reserves to provide proper care/maintenance or funds for development.

Might what the Catholic church believes and teaches about the dignity of every human person be compromised when the cemetery is abandoned or not maintained? Cremation presents new challenges and opportunities, especially for the nearly full or forgotten parish cemetery.

Nothing significant can be done until the cemetery is integrated into the life of the parish! Integration means that parishioners are involved in administration/care, that the cemetery is used for a various prayer opportunities, and that all age groups are provided catechesis on what the church believes about death, life after death, and the dignity of the baptized. This requires parish participation at all levels.

Maybe a parish organization needs fund raising or another type of activity. Offering a flower planting service at the parish cemetery for those who may not live close might be one simple option to consider, i.e. Scouts, Confirmation class, Youth?

## *Mt. Carmel Cemetery* (A CASE STUDY)

Mt. Carmel Cemetery and Christ the King Parish are located in West Long Branch, New Jersey and part of the Diocese of Trenton. The cemetery, with an estimated 6,500 interments, was established in 1832. It is a 10 acre facility with 6 developed acres and averages 48 annual services. Two additional mausoleum buildings are moving from planning toward construction, and when completed, each will contain 432 crypts and 389 niches for cremated remains; construction will be sequential with 70% sales initiating the second building. Both openings/closings and maintenance are contracted.

As the parish/cemetery business manager for the past 9 years, I've recently purchased and now use ***The Toolbox for Parish Cemeteries***. Because the manuals are both thorough and well- organized, they are easy to use; the information and guidance are extremely valuable; answers to questions and resource information are easily found, and they support both planning and daily decisions.

***The Toolbox*** is a treasure chest of information for cemetery managers and their staff and I highly recommend the use of the entire series.

*Frank C. Muzzi Business Manager*

## WEB SITE SAMPLE STRUCTURE

While consulting for the Trustees of St. Patrick's Cathedral and their four major cemeteries our firm was tasked to assist in the design and write the content for a new set of web sites. Gate of Heaven, one of them, is located in Hawthorne, NY and its web site is [www.gateofheavenny.com](http://www.gateofheavenny.com).

Doing a Google search of Gate of Heaven offers at least 10 titles under which it can be found; this is because the web site was professionally designed and placed.

The address is published here so that those who neither have a parish cemetery web site, nor have all the appropriate content, can check out the different categories and content. As the content is not copyrighted, those receiving this newsletter can avail themselves of both the list of topics and modify contents to meet local needs. In this fashion, your parish cemetery will be able to offer a comprehensive and quite helpful web site.



## *About the author*

Unless otherwise noted, articles appearing in this newsletter are written by Joseph B. Sankovich. He is semi-retired after a 45-year career in the Catholic cemetery apostolate, meeting the Catholic cemetery needs of 40 client (arch)dioceses. Additional biographic details are available at [www.sankovich.com](http://www.sankovich.com).

## *I have a question/comment*

The goal of this publication is to make it as responsive to the needs of those who administer or care in any other way for Catholic parish cemeteries. If you have a comment, suggestion, or question of general interest to pastors, managers, superintendents or board members, please submit it to [joe@sankovich.com](mailto:joe@sankovich.com) and every effort will be made to address it in a future edition of the newsletter.



## Lay apostolate

Pastors have canonical responsibility for parish cemeteries. But pastors typically serve one or two terms, usually no more than 12 years. The cemetery is complex with governing and maintenance obligations. Parishioners are strongly connected to the cemetery if family members are interred there. It stands to reason that parishioners relieve the pastor of some of the burdens for the cemetery. The easiest first step is to form a parish cemetery advisory board and make use of **The Toolbox for Parish Cemeteries** to recruit and train board members. This frees a pastor for the cemetery pastoral and liturgical opportunities. After all, the parish cemetery continues to remind those who've lost spouses/parents/children that they will be reunited in eternal life. Every pastor with a parish cemetery, if spending any time within the cemetery, will always find the bereaved in need of a comforting word.

**“The world has no desire to mourn; it would rather disregard painful situations, cover them up or hide them. Much energy is expended on fleeing from situations of suffering in the belief that reality can be concealed. But the cross can never be absent.**

**“A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life's depths and finding authentic happiness.”**

*Paragraphs 75 - 76, **Gaudete et Exultate** On the Call to Holiness in Today's World, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, Easter 2018*

## Prayer for the Dead

*Inspired by a recently confirmed high school student sitting at his father's grave in a parish cemetery and contemplating his future life path.* When asked, most young people believe in some form of life beyond the grave but find no comfort/affiliation to the common formula prayers for the dead, i.e. “Eternal rest grant unto...” A more contemporary model, easily taught by catechists and grandparents, is rooted in the structure of the Eucharistic celebration, i.e. reconciliation, readings, and Eucharistic Prayer of Thanksgiving. It works this way: the praying individual, either at an interment site or elsewhere, brings to mind the deceased person with whom a relationship existed in life. Memory (just like the Scripture readings at Mass) is the first step and involves all the good and not so good experiences in the relationship. Reconciliation is the second step with thoughts directed toward acts/behaviors that require either asking for or granting forgiveness; granting or asking for forgiveness is the second step. Thanksgiving, once having granted/accepted forgiveness, is the third step. The praying individual gives thanks to/for the individual's part/involvement in his/her life, and thanks God for bringing the two together in however long the earthly span of their relationship has existed. This new and perhaps more dynamic form of prayer for the dead can easily be expanded upon and taught, especially by those preparing young people for Confirmation.

### THE TOOLBOX FOR PARISH CEMETERIES

Order form available online at:

[www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com](http://www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com)

Administration Handbook	\$80
Cemetery Self-Evaluation	\$50
Cemetery Workbook	\$70
Endowment Care Calculator	\$40
Policies & Procedures	\$50
Rules & Regulations	\$50
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$340</b>

#### Packing & Shipping

individual book	\$10
2–5 books	\$20
full set of books	\$20

#### DISCOUNT SCHEDULE

2–9 sets	\$325
10–24 sets	\$300
25+ sets	\$275

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#### PAYMENT OPTIONS

1. Pre-payment preferred
2. Special arrangement (email for help)
3. Bill the parish/cemetery
4. Parish/cemetery credit card

## A helpful hint

A **Policies & Procedures** manual is part of **The Toolbox for Parish Cemeteries**. Within the Inventory & Development section is Policy 4.2, recommending that memorialization include identification of the section, lot, and graves being memorialized. A simple addition to the top of the base of the monument (standard location being left or right side) can appear as **Holy Cross, Row 2, Lot 103, Graves A-C**. This can easily be abbreviated as **HC R2,103: A-C**.

Why bother? If your parish cemetery doesn't have an on-site office, is located some distance from the parish office, doesn't have at least one full time groundskeeper on staff, then helping a family member or visitor locate a grave is sometimes almost impossible without someone going to the cemetery to identify the space.

**Implementation of this policy is quite simple:** denote it as a memorialization requirement and provide the correct identification with the application for permission to place a monument or marker. Use a standard location for placement and a uniform size and font for the inscription.

Typically, when a visitor comes to the parish office trying to find a grave, s/he is shown the cemetery or section map; but often people find it difficult to orient themselves. Having identifying numbers on monuments and memorials assists both general orientation and more easily enables finding desired locations.

What about monuments/memorials that have been placed without identification? Speak to one or more monument dealer providing inscription service in your cemetery. Ask for a unit cost to add identification. And then ask for a reduced price if inscriptions are done in units of 10 or 25. Explain the rationale to easement owners in either the parish bulletin or a cemetery newsletter and solicit participation, making sure individuals giving permission to add engraving to existing memorialization have the right to grant that permission. Not only will the effort to adopt this identification process make visitation easier, it will also assist verification for those who open/close graves, help florists who deliver flowers to your cemetery, and support the efforts of monument dealers bringing new memorialization into your cemetery.

# THE CATHOLIC PARISH CEMETERY

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## Another helpful hint

Working with smaller Catholic parish cemeteries has uncovered challenges that have been explained/demonstrated by pastors, parish business and cemetery managers. In a number of instances, because of either missing or confusing records, these individuals thought or believed that no solution was accessible to address their current situations. Cemetery software has been able to bring rest to a number of these concerns and provide a plan/solution to problems previously thought insurmountable. Software, however, must be user friendly and accessible to both the novice and skilled cemetery staff or volunteer.

Fundamental realities to be considered include:

- Reliable ownership and burial records in order to meet current and future needs.
- A plan of attack is necessary when it has been determined that records are either incomplete or inaccurate.
- Computer software programs can be evaluated with on-line tours so contact with software vendors will be very helpful.

Entering existing data within the framework of the cemetery's mapping system (lot/grave/row numbers) allows data to be checked when conflicting information (i.e. a double-entry is attempted). These situations can be set aside and/or assigned to volunteers so that family members can be

contacted for resolutions. It is also possible to capture information from all monuments and memorials so that this data can also be used to resolve discrepancies.

***One thing is certain:*** Parish cemetery data/information problems cannot be addressed unless and until a commitment is made to start.

The outcome is well-worth the effort. Parish cemeteries struggling with problem records can finally access tools that will lead to resolutions. Always remember, however, that an effective and efficient software program must be affordable, user-friendly, and designed to meet the needs of Catholic parish cemeteries.

## The Eickhof Ossuary/Columbarium

(BY GUEST ARTICLE WRITER)

In ancient Rome/Athens graves were not permanently occupied; they were reused. This meant that after a certain number of years, the grave would be opened, the bones removed and placed in a container (ossuary) so that the grave could be reused. That container was reserved at another place in the cemetery.

Cremation has created an entirely new situation with a variety of responses to respectful care for cremated remains. The urgency of timely burial has been removed and survivors sometimes delay in deciding how to care for the cremated remains. For Catholics and members of their families, this decision is guided by the church's teachings about the body, in whatever form, has been the temple of the Holy Spirit, and is deserving of respectful interment with proper identification.

The parish cemetery is able to easily offer a variety of cremation interment alternatives with a range of prices to meet the financial situations of families. Typically, the cemetery will offer smaller grave spaces with either flush markers or monuments, or the cremated remains can be buried in the grave of a family member. The most efficient and practical long term solution is for a cemetery to provide above-ground interment in a columbarium.

The Eickhof Ossuary/Columbarium is ideal for the parish cemetery for the following reasons:

- It maximizes the use of a small parcel of land to include far more interment spaces;
- It allows multiple price points for niches located at different heights;
- It accepts multiple cremated remains in a common space, a less expensive alternative, while not commingling remains and allowing for identification/memorialization;
- It provides a tamper-proof security system that is essential for parish cemeteries that may be located away from the parish church;
- Unlike grave spaces an Eickhof Ossuary/Columbarium with above-ground inurnment has very little maintenance.

Aesthetically the Eickhof Ossuary/Columbarium is beautiful. It is finished in granite and can be beautifully landscaped with benches, flowers, bushes, and trees. This beauty will appeal to families desiring a place to memorialize their loved ones.

In the United States, 2017 was the first year that cremation surpassed traditional burial as the families preferred choice when choosing final disposition. An Eickhof Ossuary/Columbarium will help any Catholic cemetery keep the parish cemetery viable far into the future. The world is changing. It behoves the Catholic Cemetery administrators to embrace this change to continue serving parish families.



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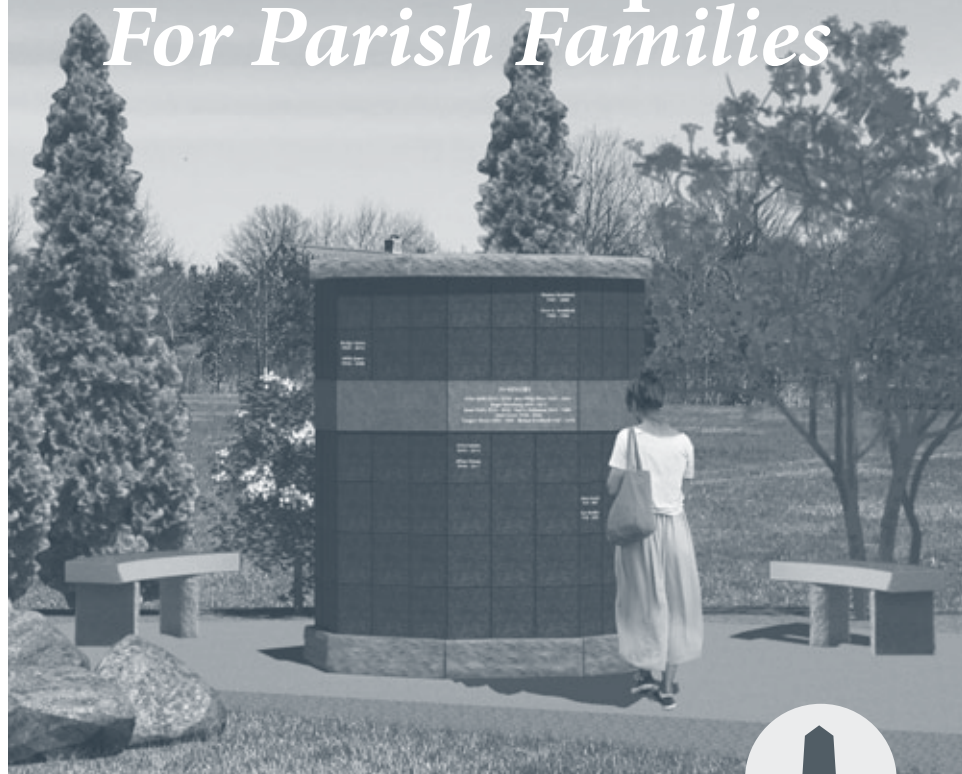
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## Parish Perfect Package

MBS is proud to offer our fully integrated Parish Perfect Package, designed and priced to fit your parish cemetery needs. The package includes our **Nexus Express cemetery management application**, which tracks your property inventory, ownership and burial records, work orders and much more.

The package also includes our **GIS mapping system, IMAP**, which is fully integrated with Nexus Express. IMAP is a GPS mapping program capable of sending space location information to smart devices for directions to a grave location. Paper map directions can also be printed. The maps are color coded based on the status of the space, making sales and service easy.

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