

# THE CATHOLIC PARISH CEMETERY



Meeting Challenges *e* Recognizing Opportunities

## Editor's Notes

We begin our second volume of *The Catholic Parish Cemetery Newsletter* with this issue. I am happy that John Cherek, recently retired after more than 25 years with *The Catholic Cemeteries* of the *Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis*, has consented to share thoughts on the parish cemetery apostolate. John was a parish business and cemetery manager before assuming the director of cemeteries role and we've been friends and collaborators over these many years. He is an incredible resource and many parish cemetery people have benefitted from his wisdom.

A second important reality is the group of vendors/suppliers that both support this endeavor and offer goods and services that meet the needs of parish cemeteries. Several vendors are not with us for this issue as they indicated that they have heard from none of the parish cemetery people reached by the newsletter.

***I am making a special request of the thousands of staff and volunteers involved in parish cemeteries.*** Even if you are only curious about what a particular vendor has to offer, or have a question about how that vendor's product/service might be appropriate for your parish cemetery, please call or email the vendor and ***indicate first that you saw an ad in this newsletter*** and that ad is motivating your call. It will be impossible to continue this newsletter unless vendors begin hearing from you and connecting your inquiry to this newsletter.

## Growing Christian Hospitality

by John M. Cherek, CCCE

Does this scenario sound familiar? A call from the parish office or funeral director notifies you that a death has occurred and a family will need a burial site. You obtain the requisite family information from the caller. The cemetery burial process has begun. The gravedigger needs to be contacted; the records checked to see if there are any family connections in the cemetery. Someone from the cemetery will then contact the family and set up a time to meet at the cemetery. At the cemetery the family will be shown various available burial options and a decision will be made. Grave costs and fees may be discussed as well as payment policies. The family leaves the cemetery and the cemetery representative starts the internal process of preparing the burial site, whether in-ground or above ground.

The next point of contact between the family and the cemetery will be on the determined date and time of burial. Depending on the type of burial, families may arrive at the cemetery in procession from the church or may randomly arrive to gather for the burial. Upon arriving at the cemetery, after getting out of their cars, the family and friends move to the burial site, usually following the casketed remains or the cremated remains. The remains are placed on or near the burial opening, everyone gathers around the immediate family, and the presider leads the committal prayers. At the conclusion of the prayer, family members may perform a farewell ritual, watch the lowering of the casket or placement of the urn, and visit with each other until someone determines it is time to leave. Everyone returns to their cars and leaves the cemetery. The cemetery then closes the burial site; the burial process is complete.

At first glance this scenario may appear rather simplistic and generic. Yet it is designed to assist you in forming a picture of what actually happens during this core activity in your parish cemetery. As there are hundreds of parish cemeteries across the land, there are as many multiple variations that occur in the process. All that is asked of you at this point is to objectively record what happens in your respective cemetery in regard to these routine events. Having formed that image, what does it look like to you? How does it feel to you as the cemetery representative? How do you think it feels to the bereaved family?

With that image in mind, there is no right or wrong answer, it is what it is and becomes the starting point for discussing to what degree your parish cemetery is practicing the basic elements of Christian hospitality?

Pope Francis states that hospitality is at the core of our mission as church, "Hospitality is measured by the degree of kindness we show others, including strangers. It is our treatment of them. It is the welcome we give to someone's presence and/or approach, even if it makes us uncomfortable. It is our willingness to listen to other's stories about their life, hardships, and issues. It is our willingness to refrain

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from dismissing them for any reason... today, we need a Church capable of walking at people’s side...a Church which accompanies them on their journey.” (Address to Brazilian Bishops: *Are we still a Church capable of warming hearts?*)

According to Pope Francis kindness and treatment shown to others, including strangers, is a basic element. Welcoming the other person, as Christ would welcome, is another critical element. A willingness to listen to the other person is required; dismissing the other person for

any reason is not acceptable. Accompanying the other person, walking by their side, is a key to Christian hospitality.

In response to Pope Francis’ invitation to practice Christian hospitality, in many Christian communities, there is an emerging concept and practice called “radical hospitality”. What is radical hospitality?

Radical hospitality means following Jesus’ example of gathering people into the body of Christ by intentionally inviting them into the life of the community. Jesus’ example of hospitality requires an **unceasingly invitational posture** that we carry with us into the world. It involves seeing ourselves as sent by Christ to go out of our way, even at the risk of a sense of discomfort and inconvenience, to invite people into some aspect of the church’s ministry. Radical hospitality envisions a Church that strives to exceed expectations and goes beyond the normal standards of maintaining what has always been done, always seeking the fulfillment of the mission given to the Church by Christ.

**Editor’s Note:** *This article is the first of a three-part contribution; the first part lays a foundation for the practical applications that will follow in the next two issues of this Newsletter.*

Catechesis & Evangelization

In the previous issue of the newsletter I provided an article on the origins of the **Catholic Cemetery Tradition**, making note that it was available for reprinting at both parish and diocesan levels and one diocesan monthly magazine reprinted the article. Here is a series of shorter articles more suitable for the parish bulletin. They could be used prior to and during the month of November or prior to Memorial Day. The first is a shorter version of what appeared in the last newsletter. Feel free to use all/any to meet your needs without any prior permission.

CATHOLIC CEMETERY TRADITION [Insert: 1 of 6]

Catholic cemeteries trace their roots back to Abraham and the Jewish practice of providing separate burial grounds. The early Christians continued this practice; it was a faith statement about the body’s dignity in death and trust in the resurrection of Jesus.

Baptism makes the body a temple of the Holy Spirit to be nourished throughout life at the Eucharistic table. When we visit the burial sites of our loved ones, we experience the same Eucharistic dynamic, memory and thanksgiving. We often recognize the need for reconciliation with our beloved dead and prayer at the cemetery is an effective approach toward healing.

Catholic cemeteries manifest the “now/not yet” status of the Kingdom of God. In a Catholic cemetery our deceased relatives and friends rest among members of the same faith community who professed the same sure conviction that one day the body will be reunited with soul in glory to be with the Risen Lord.

Catholic cemeteries are of several types: the individual parish cemetery typically serves one parish; a “joint” parish cemetery serves multiple parishes with one parish typically taking the administrative lead; and the (arch)diocesan cemetery typically serves a larger group of parishes and is administered through a diocese or archdiocese.

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THE TOOLBOX FOR PARISH CEMETERIES

The ToolBox enables parish and cemetery leadership to objectively evaluate and document the status, shortcomings, and needs of the parish cemetery. The **Self Evaluation** manual is designed for in-house collaboration among pastor, parish business manager, cemetery manager, parish and/or finance council, and cemetery board. When completed, those in leadership positions will have hard data and important information to identify and prioritize needs. More information is found at [www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com](http://www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com) and an order form is located in this newsletter.



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.



## Catholic Cemetery Tradition — Insert 1 *cont'd*

Painful as it might be, we return to these burial places to find the mortal remains of those who have joined with the communion of saints. The church invites us to pray for their eternal rest. In the stillness of the cemetery, may you pray with the early Church, ***Marana tha!—Lord Jesus, come!***

### CATHOLIC CEMETERY ADMISSION [Insert: 2 of 6]

Today's simple question: ***Who is eligible to be buried in a Catholic cemetery?*** Those living before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1966) might remember the list of requirements for a baptized Catholic to be admitted to a Catholic cemetery for interment. In addition to Baptism, the list included being married in a Catholic church before a priest and two witnesses, confessing one's serious sins at least once a year, making one's Easter Duty (reception of Communion during the Easter Season), being a registered and supporting member of a Catholic parish, and not being the subject of scandal. Proof of eligibility involved the parish supplying a certificate to the Catholic cemetery, referred to as ***priest's lines***.

When the Catholic bishops returned from the Second Vatican Council in 1966 they determined that the Catholic cemetery should not be used as a disciplinary tool. They changed both the regulations and our understanding of the purpose of the Catholic cemetery. The Catholic cemetery was no longer to be used as a disciplinary tool, but was to reflect what the Catholic church professes and the faithful believe about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and His promise that one day His followers would participate in His Resurrection and share Eternal Life.

Today's requirement for eligibility is simple: Catholic Baptism. But it's not quite that simple. Even the intention or desire for Baptism is qualifying. So those adults who are preparing for admission to the Catholic church are eligible. So are infants whose parents intended to have them baptized.

Finally, the Catholic church extends an invitation to family members of other religious traditions to be buried with the Catholic members of their families. Should there be eligibility questions, the best places to obtain information are pastors and Catholic cemetery directors. When they have questions, they know who in the diocesan leadership structure must be contacted.

### ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS [Insert: 3 of 6]

The ***Catholic funeral and cemetery tradition*** flows logically from fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith such as:

***The dignity of each human person***

***The importance of Baptism***

***The reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ***

***Jesus' promise that we will share eternal life***

***The value and need to pray for the dead***

***Eucharist as the great act of memory and thanksgiving for redemption.***

Death is typically experienced within a parish community, the place of Baptism and Eucharist, the place where the bereaved must find comfort in the believing community. Our faith teaches that death and burial are experiences that must be celebrated and the church provides the ***Order of Christian Funerals*** with three distinct elements to observe the death of a Catholic.

The ***Vigil*** is observed as a wake in the funeral home with the body present. The ***Mass of Christian Burial*** is best celebrated at the church in the company of family, friends, and the parish community. The ***Committal Rite and Farewell*** brings our beloved deceased to the place of rest to await reunion with family and the Risen Lord. It is proper that the deceased be interred among the Catholic believing community in a Catholic diocesan or parish cemetery.

### CREMATION IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION [Insert: 4 of 6]

The **1983 Code of Canon Law** articulates the cremation position for Catholics: ***"The church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching."***

Cremation may be chosen for good reason. This might include hygienic, economic reasons, transfer of the remains to a distant place, ethnic tradition/custom, or a severe fear of earth burial.

***The selection of cremation should be the specific choice of the individual before death.***

***The wishes and concerns of family members must be considered***

If possible, the ***Order of Christian Funerals*** should be celebrated, including ***Vigil, Funeral Mass*** with the body present, and ***Committal Service*** at the Catholic cemetery. If the ***Order of Christian Funerals*** cannot be celebrated in total, the ***Funeral Mass*** and ***Committal Service*** are given first priority. The ***Funeral Mass*** may be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains.

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## Retained Cremated Remains

Those responsible for Catholic parish cemeteries are often the best resource for new, different and creative responses to challenges in this apostolate. One of those issues: ***families either retaining cremated remains or abandoning them at the crematory or funeral home.*** This is only one of multiple issues arising since the relaxation of the cremation prohibition and I'd like to solicit brief email responses to what different parishes with

Catholic cemeteries are doing to convince the bereaved that [1] cremated remains are to be memorialized in a specific cemetery location, and [2] that it is never too late to bring cremated remains that have been held at home to the cemetery for respectful interment. Please respond to [Joe@Sankovich.com](mailto:Joe@Sankovich.com) and I will share innovative ideas in the next edition of the Parish Cemetery Newsletter.

## MAILING LIST INFORMATION

Your parish has received this newsletter in hard copy format based on a list of all Catholic Parishes in the United States that have either a parish cemetery designation [PC] or joint parish cemetery designation [JC] in the P.J. Kenedy ***Official Catholic Directory***, most recent edition. If the listing is incorrect, the only way to remedy the situation is to contact the office in your own diocese that prepares/submits/maintains the files submitted to P.J. Kenedy each year.

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7273 East Shoreward Loop  
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[ Sign up for an electronic version of *The Catholic Parish Cemetery Newsletter* at: [www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com](http://www.catholicparishcemeteriesus.com) ]  
*Double-click directly on the “Newsletters” tab (not “Past Issues”) and scroll to the registration form.*

## Cremation in the Catholic Cemetery Tradition — Insert 4 *cont’d*

Pre-planning is critical for a number of reasons, including:

**The opportunity to collaborate with other family members.**

**The need to plan for the celebration of the Order of Christian Funerals.**

**The need to fully understand selections and attending obligations.**

If giving serious consideration to cremation, what are the appropriate steps? The following recommendations are appropriate:

1. Understand the teachings and traditions of our faith community.
2. Discuss cremation with those closest to you; make sure they can accept cremation should you pre-decease them.
3. Consult with experienced professionals about advance arrangements. Such selections would include: religious celebrations, choice of cemetery, decision about in-ground or above-ground inurnment, selection of an appropriate urn, and possible payment in advance for items that can be secured in this fashion.

The Catholic church rejects scattering, division, and use of cremated remains to fashion jewelry or pottery and earnestly commends burial or inurnment and memorialization of cremated remains as a mark of respect for the human body which was a temple of the Holy Spirit.

### CATHOLIC CEMETERY PRODUCTS [Insert: 5 of 6]

Products offered in any cemetery, religious or not, typically depend upon the number of annual services. The larger the number of annual interments, the more diverse the products that can be offered and supported.

At a minimum, cemeteries will offer **ground interment spaces** at depths to accommodate one or more individuals. Ground burial will be differentiated by memorialization type, a marker flush with the grass or a monument that stands above grade. Multiple spaces are typically required for an upright monument.

Above-ground community mausoleums are of two types, i.e. chapel and garden. The **chapel mausoleum** will be temperature regulated with crypts in chapels and corridors. The **garden mausoleum** does not have climate-controlled interior space; crypts in this facility will be located on patios open to the weather. Mausoleum crypts are available in different configuration and at different levels. Price is based on interior/exterior, location in the complex, configuration, and level. A cemetery

may also offer the **individual family mausoleum** and it is built to meet owner size and space requirements according to cemetery specifications.

To accommodate current church discipline and practice, Catholic cemeteries, regardless of size, will offer a variety of options for the respectful disposition and **memorialization of cremated remains**. The division or scattering of cremated remains is not consonant with Catholic discipline or practice.

Cremated remains may be interred in a grave and memorialized. Above-ground inurnment of cremated remains takes place in niches that can be located within or on an outside wall of a mausoleum. Glass or marble-front niches may be available within a secure building. Free-standing columbaria may be located within a section or as a feature in a cremation garden.

### PRE-NEED PLANNING [Insert: 6 of 6]

The church recognizes the many emotions that family members experience when facing the death of a loved one. Surrounded by family and friends, accompanied by the prayers and sacraments, the time of death can be a grace-filled moment when faith and family bonds are strengthened.

The disciplines pertaining to eligibility for interment in a Catholic cemetery have significantly changed since the Second Vatican Council. Catholic Baptism of at least one immediate family member is now the requirement. Questions about eligibility should be discussed with the pastor of the Catholic’s parish.

With this foundational understanding, the church encourages communication among family members well in advance of the need to make funeral and cemetery arrangements. The **Order of Christian Funerals** is quite flexible and one or more elements will meet most family needs. To assure the most responsive liturgy, parishioners are encouraged to schedule time to meet with a priest or pastoral minister well in advance.

Pre-planning in a Catholic cemetery allows families to consider the various available cemetery options, costs, and payment plans well in advance of need. This pre-planning assures that the time surrounding death is able to be devoted to family members supporting one another and enables the celebration of the deceased’s movement to eternal life.

The cemetery does not sell spaces, but rather the certificate of interment rights grants use, not ownership, of the space for a specific interment purpose; this distinction is important. Catholic church disciplines and specific rules and regulations accompany and are integral to the certificate. In new purchases, endowment or perpetual care is included in the cost.



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