

# THE CATHOLIC PARISH CEMETERY

VOL 2 ISSUE 2

Meeting Challenges *e* Recognizing Opportunities

## Editor's Notes

Your editor is just back to the United States after three weeks in Poland. The purpose of this trip was multifaceted. As my mother was of Polish descent I wanted to experience firsthand the culture her parents brought from Poland. I was able to do that in the multiple cities visited as well as by visiting the small town outside of Krakow from which my grandfather originated. I was able to locate the parish cemetery, the parish being established in the 1300s, and make my way through row after row of interments to identify the graves of my great grandfather with his surname as well as the surname of his wife prior to their marriage. The experience was incredible, especially discovering that the keeper of the cemetery records is related. I will be able to continue my research by organizing all the monument pictures with names/dates, checking out the Mormon genealogy site, and then enlisting the help of a friend from Krakow to make contact with the pastor of this small parish to see if he can make use of other sacramental records to fill in missing data and supply relationships. The Catholic cemetery is a valuable history of heritage as well as a testament to our shared belief in eternal life. In every parish and large cemetery I visited on this trip I found people visiting and caring for the graves of their loved ones. I saw lots of candles and flowers, but I also saw people bringing buckets and towels to wash the granite and rinse the artificial flowers. It certainly helps to understand where the descendants of our immigrant grandparents/parents come from and what the cemetery traditions were that they experienced.

In this issue we are also continuing the article by John Cherek, recently retired after more than 25 years with *The Catholic Cemeteries* of the *Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis*. As previously mentioned, 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.

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Again *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 that 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.

Finally, for those among you who might consider following my or John Cherek's path from a parish cemetery superintendent to a position as diocesan director of cemeteries, I offer a handbook I developed for diocesan cemetery directors and their supervisors. If you might be considering upward mobility, this is the document you want to fully inform you of all aspects of diocesan cemetery program management; you could use it as a discernment tool or in preparation for applying for a diocesan cemetery leadership position.

It is titled *Diocesan Cemetery Program: Supervisor's Handbook*. The price for the handbook is \$149.00 and includes handling/shipping. Ordering is simple: send an email to [Joe@Sankovich.com](mailto:Joe@Sankovich.com) with your request and I will use your provided information to both bill and ship the document to you.

## Growing Christian Hospitality

[Second of Three Parts]

by John M. Cherek, CCCE

Returning to the image of how the core elements of the burial process are practiced in your parish cemetery, the next step is to assess how your parish cemetery is currently practicing the elements of Christian hospitality. In reviewing how these events transpire in your parish cemetery, many of us might reasonably conclude we are doing a good job, or at least an adequate job, in embodying these general elements of Christian hospitality in these times of encounter between a bereaved family and the parish cemetery? Others may rightfully feel proud of how families are welcomed to the cemetery; some others may deduce improvement is needed in this area of their cemetery ministry. Regardless of where your cemetery falls on the spectrum of Christian hospitality you are encouraged to consider the following points of reflection to elevate the elements of Christian hospitality in your parish cemetery operation:

As a general consideration of routine cemetery business and operational practices, how can elements of "radical hospitality" be implemented?

In an at-need meeting with a bereaved family, consider the following points:

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## Growing Christian Hospitality [2 of 3] *continued from page 1*

- View your role as an ambassador or disciple of the Church who reaches out in compassion and service to the family. This is not only a business transaction, but an encounter between caring and responsible Christians.
- Welcome people by name and genuinely and warmly extend your sympathies.
- Invite the family to share their story of grief, as tragic or sad as it may be, while assuming a posture of attentive listening.
- Make no assumptions or judgments about the bereaved family as to their appearance or financial status. They might be strangers to the Church or may be well known in the parish community.
- Present all available burial options in the cemetery. Inquire if other family members may be buried in the cemetery.
- Be knowledgeable about the cemetery, the options available, and the steps in the burial process so that you are able to competently respond to questions.
- Be knowledgeable about the general nature of grief and the aspects of active listening in order to better accompany the bereaved at this difficult time of choosing a burial site for a loved one. For many this may be the first time for them planning a funeral.
- Approach financial details in a gentle manner, ready to positively answer questions raised by the family. If needed, provide an opportunity for the family to privately discuss their decision.
- Close out the process when the family has made their decision and has had all of their questions answered and appears ready to move on. Again, thank them by name and compassionately assure them that all will be taken care of by the cemetery.

**Editor's Note:** *This article is the second of a three-part contribution; the third part will address preparation of the burial site as well as considerations for the interment service; the final section will appear in the next Newsletter.*

## Catechesis & Evangelization

In the June issue of the newsletter I provided six shorter articles more suitable for the parish bulletin. My hope is that you captured these and are using them during the month of November in your parish bulletin or cemetery newsletter. If you missed the opportunity, check out the posted newsletter for the articles and consider using them for Memorial Day next year. The titles are [1] **The Catholic Cemetery Tradition**, [2] **Catholic Cemetery Admission**, [3] **Order of Christian Funerals**, [4] **Cremation in the Catholic Tradition**, [5] **Catholic Cemetery Products**, and [6] **Pre-Need Planning**. These articles could also be used in a parish cemetery newsletter or in one or more pamphlets. Feel free to use all/any to meet your needs without any prior permission.

## Perpetual/Endowment Care [First of Two Parts]

Perhaps one of the most troubling issues for parish cemeteries is perpetual care for interment sites that have been purchased. In earlier times, many parish cemeteries used annual care for the maintenance of the cemetery. The dynamic included setting a cost for the care/upkeep of each individual grave space that had been purchased/used; it then involved collecting the money that was calculated/owed on an annual basis. The larger the cemetery, the more difficult it became to collect and track annual care payments; families moving from parishes with cemeteries also created a problem. Of course, with this approach, it was the pastor's responsibility to inform the bereaved when someone came to request a new burial that there were outstanding obligations for care from prior years; oftentimes the amount would be larger than the cost of a new interment site. Needless to say, this created problems for both the family and the pastor.

*continued to page 3*

NEXT ISSUE:

## Succession Planning

A trusted Catholic cemetery professional, in a recent discussion, surfaced the issue of succession planning for parish cemetery leadership. That conversation reminded me of the number of older men and women volunteers I've met during hundreds of parish cemetery visits. In many interactions with these individuals the question of who might be available to succeed them was a constant theme. In our next issue, we'll address this question with observations and suggestions.

## 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 **Cemetery Workbook** manual is designed as an aid to superintendents, board members, secretaries, and operations/maintenance personnel. This document provides forms, position descriptions, checklists, and a host of other useful information that can be easily replicated for daily/repeated use in administering and operating the parish cemetery. These items assure essential details are not overlooked in tasks that are repetitive. More information is found at [www.catholicparishcemeteryus.com](http://www.catholicparishcemeteryus.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).

## Perpetual/Endowment Care [1 of 2] *continued from page 2*

Fast forward to contemporary times when hopefully most parish cemeteries have established perpetual care and converted existing interment sites to a one-time lump sum payment to cause this conversion. At the same time, all new spaces were priced to include a defined amount or percentage of the cost to be set aside for perpetual care.

As this is a topic with multiple facets, I'm going to divide it into two articles. Now that we are beyond the annual care issue: [1] hopefully every parish cemetery has a care fund, [2] care has been converted from annual to perpetual – collecting lump sums from all annual care accounts to make the conversion, and [3] care funds have been segregated from any/all other revenue collected for new sales, interment services, foundations and other income sources; this segregation should also include any other savings/reserved funds that may be earmarked for development, equipment, or other issues.

Parish cemeteries may designate either a fixed amount from the sale of an interment right or a percentage of the interment right for care fund reservation. This first article will address how to handle the reservation of care funds. In some dioceses, care funds must be remitted to the diocese on a regular schedule; in this instance, the diocese accepts responsibility for investment of these funds and may charge the parish/cemetery an administrative fee for handling the care funds. In other dioceses, care funds remain with the parish/cemetery and investments are controlled at the local level; in this instance, the parish cemetery is typically required to report any/all care fund activity with an annual report to the diocese.

We do not advocate either dynamic but acknowledge that pooling of care funds creates a much larger amount of money, allowing that money to be invested in products that typically generate a much higher

yield. Parishes retaining care funds know full well that certificates of deposit are not yielding sufficient income to grow the care fund balances.

We do offer pastors a very strong suggestion that pooled parish cemetery care funds at a diocese should be structured as a true endowment with proper legal documentation. It would be in the parish cemeteries best interest if pastors with parish cemetery responsibilities organized themselves and worked with their dioceses as units representing all parish cemeteries in a diocese. In this dynamic we are looking to assure that parish cemetery care funds are not intermingled with other diocesan funds that might expose them to settlement use in declarations of bankruptcy or other situations.

A second suggestion for pastors is to assure that all earnings from parish cemetery care funds are retained by the parish cemeteries (less any reasonable diocesan administrative fee). We are aware of at least one diocese that holds an opinion that earnings from care fund investment, once an annual established payment is satisfied to the parish cemeteries, belong in a separate account that belongs to the diocese for whatever uses it may need or desire. This is certainly an abuse of the concept of endowment care for Catholic cemeteries.

In the second installment of this topic, we will address the dynamic of use of care fund earnings. This too is an area with pitfalls that open Catholic parish cemeteries to abuse at either the parish or diocesan level.

**Editor's Note:** *A comprehensive treatment of parish cemetery endowment care, including the best ways to calculate required care fund for a particular cemetery is found in the **Endowment Care Calculator**, one of the six volumes of **The ToolBox for Parish Cemeteries**. An order form is located elsewhere in this newsletter.*

## Retained Cremated Remains

**I am repeating this element as I've not heard back from anyone! I'm sure that there is valuable information out there to share; please do your part and contribute. No response is wrong; and attribution of responses is not necessary.**

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) or [jbsankovich@gmail.com](mailto:jbsankovich@gmail.com) and I will share innovative ideas in the next edition of the Parish Cemetery Newsletter.

## *Questions/Suggestions/Comments*

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) or [jbsankovich@gmail.com](mailto:jbsankovich@gmail.com) and every effort will be made to address it in a future edition of the 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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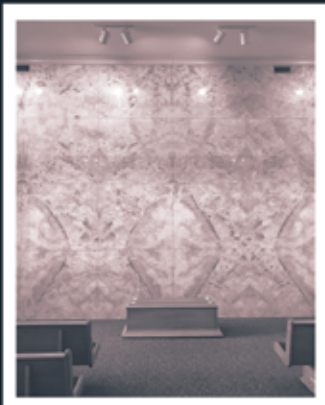
PlotBox is the international deathcare management solution that facilitates cemeteries in operating to world-class standards through integrated software and georectified mapping modules. The number and scope of problems this innovation solves revolutionizes the way deathcare facilities both operate and grow.

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