

THE IMPORTANCE OF CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

TALKING POINTS FOR PRESENTATIONS AND HOMILIES

The Talking Points below can be used for any presentation, homily, article, bulletin, religious education program/curriculum and cemetery specific promotion (e.g. cemetery specific brochures) on the importance of Catholic Cemeteries within the Catholic Church. This document also provides talking points for parishes with local cemeteries. They can be used in conjunction with the attached flyer.

Message from the Bishop:

“The Roman Catholic Church in New Hampshire has set aside Roman Catholic Cemeteries located throughout the State of New Hampshire as sacred ground for the resting places of the faithful when they die. Roman Catholic Cemeteries are more than burial grounds...” said Bishop Peter A. Libasci, D.D. “The Catholic cemetery is consecrated to mark that history, that presence, the very person God will always know, but others often forget. When we visit, look, read and pause to pray, one who is beloved of God tells his or her story once again.”

Why Choose a Catholic Cemetery?

- To honor the sacredness of the body and because of our belief that the body will be raised incorruptible, the Christian tradition, beginning with the Catacombs of Rome, has been to bury and memorialize the faithful departed by honoring the body with internment in the sacred ground of a Catholic cemetery, or other cemeteries established for the burial of human remains.
- **There are 66 Catholic cemeteries in New Hampshire.** See www.catholicnh.org/cemeteries to locate one near you. In addition to the website, the reverse side of the flyer has a listing of all the Catholic cemeteries in the state of New Hampshire.
- For Christians, in death life is changed; not ended. In death, the soul departs the body and enters into everlasting life. A Catholic cemetery gives an honorable resting place to the body until the Last Day when Christ will raise the dead to share body and soul in the Resurrected Life.
- Catholic cemeteries give witness to our faith and hope in the resurrection of the dead.
- Catholic cemeteries, like Churches, are consecrated and set apart to be places where the faithful gather to pray, to worship, and to be consoled by the peace of the Lord as they remember the souls of the faithful departed and hope for their eternal rest.
- Catholic cemeteries offer a peaceful location to fulfill the Spiritual Work of Mercy of praying for the dead.
- Catholic cemeteries provide parishioners the opportunity to come full circle at their parish – from baptism, to death, to everlasting life and the resurrection of the body.

Why Catholics Bury Their Loved Ones:

- In earlier days when Catholic communities were small, many parishes had burial grounds right on the church property. **The purpose was to know that the dead are still very much part of our parish family.** This is why we have always prayed for the dead in every Mass celebrated in our parish church. As parishes grew, it was no longer possible to surround the parish church with the graves of the faithful. Therefore, separate properties were purchased by parishes to accommodate the faithful departed of the parish.
- In a very real way, it is a more complete gathering of the parish family and the family of the Church when we recall and continue the practice of caring for our beloved dead.
- Respect for human life necessarily includes respect for the body. **Created in the image and likeness of God, every human has inherent dignity and worth, and is a unity of body and soul.**
- A proper Christian burial (preferably in a Catholic cemetery) and memorialization (inscription on a monument or marker) of the deceased person demonstrates respect for the life, the body, and soul.
- The Corporal Work of Mercy of burying the dead requires burying the dead with respect and reverence for the body/cremains as well as performing maintenance and improvements of the cemetery where the dead are interred.

Cremations:

- While Cremation may be chosen for sufficient reasons, it is preferable to honor the body with the Mass of Christian Burial with cremation to follow the Funeral Mass. The Revised Code of Canon Law states: “The Church earnestly recommends 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.” (CIC, c. 1176.3).
- While burial or entombment of the body remains the preference and is encouraged by the Church, Catholic cemeteries offer locations for the interment of cremains either in existing graves/lots, in separate cremation gardens, or in columbaria (plural of columbarium).
- In order to give proper respect for the dignity of the bodily remains, cremains are to be interred completely **intact within a nonbiodegradable urn; without scattering, separating to be encased in jewelry, or dividing so as to have multiple burial sites.**

The Catholic Funeral Rite:

- All Catholics, Catechumens, and Christians not opposed to Catholic Burial whose family makes the request, are entitled to the **Rite of Christian Burial celebrated in three parts: Vigil, Funeral Mass, and Committal (preferably in a Catholic Cemetery or other burial grounds).**

Local Message (in addition to the talking points listed above):

- Provide the history of your parish cemetery (or cemetery in your deanery), its location, and contact information. List the cemetery's beneficial features (including location, prayerful setting, etc.).
- Encourage volunteers to assist in cemetery activities, in cemetery improvement projects, in praying for our deceased loved ones at the cemetery, and in serving on bereavement committees.
- Encourage donations for cemetery capital improvements, encourage parishioners to buy a lot in their parish cemetery (or in deanery), and offer pre-need sales of lots.
- Consider discounting prices to purchase a lot around Memorial Day/All Souls' Day or if they purchase a lot within a set timeframe.
- Distribute cemetery specific brochures if available.