

Diocese of Charleston Policy on Treatment of Cremated Remains at Diocesan Cemeteries

On October 25, 2016, the instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* was published with the approval of Pope Francis to specifically address the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in case of cremation. This document is in response to the increase in cremation world-wide, along with a rise in beliefs and practices that are contrary to Catholic doctrine on death, burial and the afterlife. Nothing has changed in Church teaching, rather, this document is a restatement of previous guidelines due to the widespread mishandling of cremated remains.

Below is the Diocese of Charleston's summary of the most important information you and your families need to know:

1. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless, the Church does not prohibit cremation when it is chosen for sanitary, economic or social consideration and not for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.
2. In circumstances when cremation is chosen, this choice must never violate the explicitly stated or reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful.
3. The Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul, nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life.
4. By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of the identity. Furthermore, burial of the body in a Catholic cemetery or other sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and in which "as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works."
5. When, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful are to be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body. This includes the timely burial or inurnment in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, such as a columbarium, which has been set aside for this purpose and has been dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority.
6. Burial of the faithful departed, whether the body or the cremated remains, in cemeteries or other sacred places as noted above, encourages family members and the whole Christian community to pray for and remember the dead, while at the same time fostering the veneration of the martyrs and saints.
7. Through the practice of burying the dead in cemeteries, in churches or their environs, Christian tradition has upheld the relationship between the living and the dead and has opposed any tendency to minimize, or relegate to the purely private sphere, the event of death and the meaning it has for Christians.
8. The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect,

which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediate subsequent generation has too passed away. Also, it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.

9. For the reasons given above, **the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted.** Only in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, may the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference or the Synod of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, conceded permission in writing for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence. Due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation.

10. Furthermore, the following applies to Catholics but also to anyone wanting to be laid to rest or to be memorialized in a Catholic cemetery, church or its environs, or any other sacred space designated for the purpose of burial. **The cremated remains of the body may not be:**
 - a. **Scattered in the air, on land, at sea or in any other way;**
 - b. **Divided;**
 - c. **Mingled with any other persons, pets, or objects;**
 - d. **Preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry, or other objects;**
 - e. **Placed in the casket of another deceased person.**

11. When the deceased notoriously has requested cremation and the scattering of their ashes, for reasons contrary to the Christian faith, many of which are stated herein, a Christian funeral must be denied to that person according to the norms of the law.



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