

5F. POLICY ON CEMETERIES AND SOME ASPECTS OF FUNERALS

*Adopted September 24, 2002; effective January 1, 2003
Revised, September 2012*

PREAMBLE

The Church has always had a particular reverence for the places where the deceased are laid to their eternal rest. Catholic cemeteries exist because of our belief in the resurrection of the body, in some new shape or form, at the end of time. In many ways Catholic cemeteries are an integral part of the Church's beliefs and rites, e.g., the Church uses cemeteries as a way of assuring reverence and respect for the remains of the deceased and as a place of prayer for the souls of the faithful departed. More recently, the Church calls for the enactment of appropriate norms for "the management of cemeteries, especially in what concerns the protection and the fostering of their sacred character" (canon 1243). Recognizing the importance of the cemetery in the life of the parish as well as the number of new issues that are affecting cemeteries, the diocese wants to provide some guiding principles as parishes continue to provide places of rest for the deceased.

ARTICLE 1: THE CATHOLIC CEMETERY

The Church acknowledges that the cemetery is a sacred place, whereby the Church attempts to carry out the sacred religious function of burial and of caring for the resting places of the deceased (canon 1205). Just as the human body deserves to be treated with respect and dignity in life, so it should be treated in death. A cemetery may be a small area adjacent to a parish church or a separate site involving a much larger area. As a place blessed for the burial of the faithful, it becomes identified with the parish and gives witness to the faith of those who are buried as well as to the faith of their families.

The Catholic cemetery, then, is sacred, not only because of a blessing or consecration, but also because of the sacred function that it performs on behalf of the entire Christian community: it holds the remains of those who have died until the Lord comes again in glory; it is a place where prayer and liturgy are celebrated; it serves as a symbol of the extended community of believers, a community unbroken by death.

As a sacred place, a Catholic cemetery is a place where the signs and symbols of our Catholic faith are displayed with pride and reverence. The Catholic cemetery is the appropriate place for gathering in ritual prayer, such as the rites of committal for the dead and the celebration of the Eucharist, including an annual cemetery mass. It is also a fitting place for private prayer and meditation.

ARTICLE 2: MINISTRY ASSOCIATED WITH CEMETERIES

The burial of the dead has always been recognized by the Church as a religious rite and includes many people who are involved in this ministry: priests, deacons, religious, musicians, funeral directors, those who assist the family, those who form bereavement support groups, those who support the faithful in praying for the dead and those who serve on cemetery committees. Those involved in the ministry associated with cemeteries provide a variety of services depending on the needs of the people, the resources of the cemetery, the traditions of the parish community as well as municipal or provincial regulations. As a ministry, those involved must always be conscious of the

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necessity of maintaining a gospel approach. They must be mindful of ever-changing commercial pressures, legislative issues, societal attitudes towards death and burial and the impact of cremation.

ARTICLE 3: PARISH CEMETERY COMMITTEE

With due regard to the situation of an “interfaith” cemetery of Article 4, each parish shall establish a parish cemetery committee which shall have the following responsibilities:

- a) To compile a plot plan for each cemetery of the parish and to keep a proper record of all burials;
- b) To ensure that the parish has sufficient land for the use of the cemetery and that the land is properly surveyed and registered;
- c) To ensure that cemetery grounds are kept clean and to supervise all work performed in the cemetery;
- d) To make all preparations, in cooperation with the parish liturgy committee, for the annual Mass at the cemetery. The cemetery Mass can help to preserve the teaching and practice associated with our beliefs regarding purgatory and praying for the deceased; these beliefs find scriptural support in *2 Maccabees* 12:38-46: “It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead.”
- e) To make all arrangements for the opening and closing of graves;
- f) To be responsible for the care and operations of all machinery and equipment owned by the parish and used in the cemetery;
- g) To propose and implement cemetery regulations and requirements;
- h) To oversee, in consultation with the finance committee, all funds related to the cemetery; these funds shall be deposited in a cemetery fund separate from the ordinary operating fund of the parish;
- i) To prepare the annual budget for this committee, which shall be submitted to the parish finance committee for approval;
- j) To apply to appropriate agencies for grants, as required for the proper upkeep of the cemetery;
- k) To undertake any other duties assigned to the committee.
- l) It is the responsibility of the Pastor to oversee all of the works that are in need of being done in and around the cemetery.

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ARTICLE 4: ECUMENICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In spite of the serious difficulties that prevent full ecumenical communion, it is clear that all who, by baptism, are incorporated into Christ share many elements of the Christian life. This communion is the life of the Spirit, which already exists, and is expressed in prayer and liturgical worship. Moreover, through intermarriage, Catholics and Christians of other churches live out a vocation sharing a life experience and should not be deprived of final resting places together in death. Thus, the diocesan bishop may allow a non-Catholic to be interred in a Catholic cemetery or to have the celebration of services at a Catholic cemetery (*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 137). The bishop may delegate pastors and administrators the faculty to give this permission.

Some parishes in the diocese have an “interfaith” cemetery which includes denominational sections, i.e., a section for Catholics, a section for Anglicans, etc.

While interfaith cemeteries may have interfaith cemetery committees, the Catholic representatives on these committees shall ensure that the responsibilities mentioned in Article 3 and Article 4 are fulfilled.

As well, Parishes must abide by decisions of Inter-Faith Committees that are established to manage inter-faith cemeteries.

ARTICLE 5: REGULATIONS

The *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* provides the liturgical guidelines for the worshipping community to commend the dead to God’s merciful love and to plead for the forgiveness of their sins. All Catholic funerals follow the norms set forth in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Each diocese must apply the norms of the *Order of Christian Funerals* in light of local customs, traditions and policies.

Each parish community shall establish a parish cemetery committee. This committee shall formally adopt rules and regulations for the good order of the cemetery, the benefit of plot holders and the preservation of the identity of the Catholic cemetery. Rules and regulations should be written to provide a just and fair environment consistent with the Church’s gospel calling. Rules and regulations should cover almost every area of operation: graves and crypts, decorations, fees, and all aspects related to the interment and memorialization of the deceased.

By definition, Catholic cemeteries embody the commitment of the Church to provide burial spaces to individuals and families in perpetuity. This greater than life-long commitment places a moral responsibility upon each Catholic parish to fulfill this responsibility. Thus the cemetery needs to be cared for within the context of long-term goals, including the issue of financial support.

Parishes are responsible for maintaining the cemetery grounds, now and for future generations.

Sometimes individual parishes may work with other parishes to achieve these long-term goals.

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Every cemetery committee shall, among other responsibilities, propose regulations on the following issues:

- a) *Plot Selection*: Regulations are needed regarding the size of a single plot, double plot, plot for cremated remains, etc. Each parish shall establish the usual procedure as to who is authorized to select a plot.
- b) *Funeral Fee*: A funeral fee of **\$200** shall be charged for each person to be buried in the cemetery, noting, however, that no person will be denied the right of a Christian burial as a result of lack of funds. This fee shall include:
 - **a plot fee of \$100** which is to be deposited in the cemetery fund of each parish. Each parish shall establish how the fee will be collected. Parishes wishing to set a higher fee for the plot must consult the bishop.
 - a fee of **\$100** for the funeral service which shall be deposited in the operating account of each parish. This procedure follows the presumption that offerings on the occasion of the celebration of sacraments belong to the parish (canons 1181, 1264, and 1267, §1).
 - **in addition to these fees, a fee of \$100.00 per day when Wakes are in the Church.**
 - No person is to be denied a wake service, funeral and/or burial who is unable to pay the established fees.
- c) *Memorials*: Maximum height and width of grave markers should be established by the Parish. A suggested maximum width is the width of the plot.
- d) *Plot Maintenance*: The cemetery committee or in the absence of a cemetery committee, the parish community will ensure that all graves receive care and particular attention.

Regulations should be made concerning fences, concrete forms, plastic or wooden borders, trees or shrubs, real and/or plastic flowers, etc.

ARTICLE 6: MEMORIALIZATION

Every person buried in a Catholic cemetery is entitled to some type of memorialization. The right to memorialize should accompany each interment. Every Catholic cemetery needs clearly defined rules and regulations relative to the type of material, size, design, inscription and installation of memorials. The memorial regulations should be enforced consistently.

Memorials are an important part of fostering the community's awareness of the sacred. A memorial keeps remembrance alive. It commemorates. In a Catholic cemetery, it is lasting evidence and a reminder of a Christian life lived.

Memorials must not offend proprieties, Church discipline or good taste. While different people have

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various styles of faith expression, including recognition of an individual's life-work, vocation or pursuit, each cemetery committee must weigh the need for certain universal forms of memorialization without placing too much of a limit on the expression of an individual's memorial.

By its very nature, a Catholic cemetery abounds in memorials. The most common form of memorialization is the individual grave marker or monument. Memorialization may take many other forms, such as a mausoleum, a shrine, artwork, gardens or plants. The cemetery committee must issue regulations regarding the forms of memorialization that will be permitted in a particular cemetery.

ARTICLE 7: INTERMENT CHAPEL

The interment chapel is a space set aside for prayer, specifically the rite of committal from the *Order of Christian Funerals*. In this sheltered space, a family and the community gather to commit the one they love to God.

In some parishes, the use of interment chapels is necessary when weather or unsafe grave site conditions pose a serious difficulty to immediate interment. Decorated with Christian art, furnished with a paschal candle and a welcoming spirit, the interment chapel becomes a place for prayer and an appropriate place for the celebration of the committal rite.

ARTICLE 8: CONCERN FOR THE POOR

The Catholic cemetery is a sacred place where Catholic teaching, with its preferential option for the poor, makes clear our obligation to assist those in need. In charity, the Church must seek to minister to the poor and treat them with dignity in death, especially by ministering to those deceased who have no funds or family to care for them in death (canon 1181) therefore no person should be denied a Christian burial for lack of funds.

ARTICLE 9: CREMATION

The Catholic cemetery is a sign of Christian understanding, welcoming and prayer for individuals and families who have chosen cremation. The cremated remains should be treated with respect since they are the remains of a human body. This treatment includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the cremated remains, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to their appropriate placement and transport, and their final placement (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 427).

Cremated remains should be buried or entombed to provide a recognized place for memorialization of the deceased. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, and the practice of keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 417).

The burial of cremated remains may take place in designated cremation sections or in areas normally reserved for regular grave spaces.

ARTICLE 10: FUNERAL HOMES

Since earliest days, Christians have cared for their dead, reverencing their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. The disciples of Jesus took His body from the cross and prepared it in accordance with Jewish burial custom. The celebration of the Christian funeral by today's parish community brings hope and consolation to the living. In recent times, families have turned to neighbourhood funeral homes and sometimes a chapel in the church as places where the details of planning and carrying out the funeral rituals may be arranged.

In order to provide the fullest pastoral care to the deceased and to those in grief, these funeral homes or chapels should:

- a) provide the family with every opportunity to participate fully and to receive accurate information regarding the liturgical choices available to them in a manner fully respectful of Catholic tradition and practice;
- b) foster an atmosphere attuned to the spiritual needs of the grieving and build on the relationship with local parish communities, especially through the provision of space for a wake service;
- c) offer an opportunity to access the services of a priest or bereavement committee, thus simplifying the task of those entrusted with the responsibility of making arrangements;
- d) ensure that a family with limited means will be treated with dignity and respect, and accorded a proper funeral and a decent burial.

DRAFT CONSTITUTION FOR A PARISH CEMETERY COMMITTEE

PREAMBLE

The Church has always had a particular reverence for the places where the deceased are laid to their eternal rest. In many ways Catholic cemeteries are an integral part of the Church's beliefs and rites, e.g., the Church uses cemeteries as a way of assuring reverence and respect for the remains of the deceased and as a place of prayer for the souls of the faithful departed. More recently, the Church calls for the enactment of appropriate norms for "the management of cemeteries, especially in what concerns the protection and the fostering of their sacred character" (canon 1243). Recognizing the nature of its cemetery and the particular concerns of the parish at this time, the Parish of XXXXX desires to respond to this call.

ARTICLE 1: NAME

The name of the committee shall be XXXX Parish Cemetery Committee, known in this constitution as the cemetery committee.

ARTICLE 2: PURPOSE

The purpose of the committee is to assist the pastor in his responsibility for the care and management of the cemetery of the parish. The committee will ensure that the cemetery appropriately reflects the dignity and reverence that the Church has for cemeteries.

ARTICLE 3: AUTHORITY

The cemetery committee cooperates with and makes decisions with the pastor, who has the ultimate responsibility for the care of all properties belonging to the parish.

The cemetery committee has a special relationship with the finance committee. The committee should report all financial decisions to the finance committee. The annual budget for this committee should be approved by the finance committee.

If there are issues that have a direct influence on the pastoral care of parishioners; these issues should also be discussed with the parish pastoral council.

The committee has the authority to issue rules and regulations for the upkeep and proper management of the cemetery. Since these rules and regulations have some financial and pastoral implications, the cemetery committee shall consult with the finance committee and the pastoral council before the regulations are finalized.

ARTICLE 4: MEMBERSHIP

As with other committees in the parish, the parish priest is the president of the cemetery committee. The committee shall consist of:

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- a) four [or another number] parishioners elected by the parish for a three year period, which may be renewable;
- b) two parishioners appointed by the parish priest in consultation with the other four elected members.

ARTICLE 5: OFFICERS

The committee shall elect the following officers from its members:

- a) Chairperson
- b) Vice-Chairperson
- c) Secretary
- d) Treasurer

1. The Chairperson shall:

- a) Chair all meetings of the committee and handle all that this encompasses;
- b) Be a signatory to all official documents or papers of the committee, including financial documents, together with the treasurer and parish priest;
- c) Perform other duties that the committee may request.

2. The Vice-Chairperson shall:

- a) Perform all duties/responsibilities of the chairperson in his/her absence;
- b) Assist the chairperson in carrying out his/her responsibilities.

3. The Secretary shall:

- a) Be responsible for committee communications and correspondence;
- b) Consult with the chairperson to develop an agenda for the meetings;
- c) Keep adequate minutes of all meetings of the committee and circulate minutes of each meeting, together with other reports or information of concern, to the members of the committee;
- d) Conduct all correspondence on behalf of the committee and perform such other duties as the committee may request.

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4. The Treasurer shall:

- a) Be signatory to and maintain, with the assistance of the parish secretary, current records and balances of all financial statements for the cemetery fund;
- b) Prepare, with the assistance of the parish secretary, annual financial reports for the parish;
- c) Pay all bills authorized by the committee;
- d) Prepare, with the assistance of the parish secretary, a financial statement for each meeting.

ARTICLE 6: MEETINGS

The committee shall meet several times a year [or four times a year] to consider the ongoing business of the management of the cemetery. Issues such as election procedures, quorum, voting procedures, the filling of vacancies, etc. should be addressed by the members.

ARTICLE 7: RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of the cemetery committee shall be taken from the Diocesan Policy on Cemeteries.

ARTICLE 8: CASES OF DISAGREEMENT AND POSSIBILITY OF RECOURSE

Should the pastor reject an intended action or recommendation of a majority of the committee, then the committee shall have a right to take a second vote on the issue. If the recommendation should then pass by a majority, it shall be presented to the pastor a second time for action. Should he again reject the recommendation, the committee and pastor may seek a third party facilitator to assist in coming to some final agreement on the matter in dispute. Should this process not resolve the matter, the pastor and a representative of the majority shall present the recommendation to the Bishop of the diocese or to such persons as the Bishop shall designate, for final decision.