

CREMATION

In the past cremation was generally seen as a denial of the resurrection or eternal life. However, when this is not the case, cremation is permitted. Nevertheless cremation is recommended to take place following the funeral Mass or liturgy. It is also recommended that traditional burial in the cemetery take place as a sign of Catholic belief in the final resurrection and as a sign of membership in a community of faith.

A Full Celebration

In choosing cremation as a means of burial, Catholics need to be cautioned about other decisions that might be associated with cremation. Cremation may be part of an unfortunate trend today to omit altogether, or to reduce to a minimum, the Church's rites of Christian burial. The full celebration of a Christian funeral consists of three main rites: the vigil for the deceased (the first time the community gathers to pray and listen to God's word), the funeral liturgy (either a funeral Mass or a liturgy of the word), and the rite of committal normally celebrated at the body's final resting place. All three of these rites should be celebrated whenever possible. This trend towards minimalism is revealed when, for the sake of expediency, cremation is chosen.

Prohibition Lifted

As noted above, cremation was once forbidden to members of the church because it was looked upon as a denial of the resurrection of the body. Today, when people deny the need of a Christian burial or a Funeral Mass, this might stem from a new sort of denial: a denial of the Church's belief in the afterlife and of the need for ongoing purification and the prayers for the dead. In this case, using cremation as a way of expediting a funeral flows from an attitude that is in contradiction to Christian faith. It may reflect a world that does not like to deal with death, which is seen as an embarrassment, something to be gotten through as quickly as possible, with a minimum of pain or bother. Yet for Catholics death is a statement that life on earth is precious and is the passage to a fuller, final life with the risen Christ.

Prayer for the Dead

Death does not end a relationship of love, because life does not end with death but continues in a new way. Because of our love for the deceased we continue to pray for the person as they

continue their journey to perfect happiness in God. In heaven our loved ones continue their mission to pray for us. We believe in the communion of saints – in the unity of the living and dead in Christ.

Cremation is an acceptable alternative for Catholics, when it is not chosen as a denial of the resurrection and afterlife. There are many legitimate reasons for choosing cremation. It might be for reasons of economy, hygiene, lack of space for earth burial, or because of difficulties in transporting the body over long distances to the place of final disposition. But whenever the choice is made for cremation, the Church prefers that it follow the funeral liturgy not precede it, so that the body can be present in the church. This enables the family and friends to give proper respect to the body before cremation and assists them in the grieving process afterwards. Through its care in preparing the body for burial, the Church has always expressed its belief in life after death and in the resurrection of the body. The prayers and gestures used in the liturgy demonstrate this reverence. The Church considers the body of every deceased Christian as sacred because it has been a temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this reverence for this body, the Church still prefers the traditional earth burial in a grave or tomb in memory of Jesus' own body being placed in a tomb.

Cremated Remains present at the Funeral Liturgy

In 1984 an indult (permission) was granted to the Canadian Church by the Roman Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, allowing the funeral liturgy, including the Eucharist, to be celebrated in the Church with the cremated remains present. There are some conditions: namely, that the cremation was not inspired by motives contrary to the Christian teaching on the resurrection, that the cremated remains are to be placed in a worthy vessel and that their burial must be in a cemetery, mausoleum or columbarium, and that the bishop of the diocese agrees that it is pastorally proper to do so. If these conditions are fulfilled, there is no problem in receiving permission. At the funeral Mass, the cremated remains, in a dignified and secure container, are placed on a small table provided for this purpose. The liturgy concludes with the final commendation and the subsequent interment of the remains.

Disposal of Cremated remains

The Church asks that in keeping with a spirit of reverence, the cremated remains be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or niche provided for this purpose (National Liturgy Office, "Catholics and Cremation," 1998). This should occur as soon as possible after the Funeral Mass, so that the ashes are not

kept in the funeral home or family dwelling. Out of respect for the body, the church does not permit the remains to be scattered over water or some favourite spot. As Christ was three days in the tomb, we too as his followers, place the dead bodies or cremated remains of our brothers and sisters in the earth with the expectation that God will raise them to life again with the glorified Christ. Information concerning the burial should be supplied to the priest for inclusion in the parish registry.

Today, many small family-run funeral homes are facing great pressures to become competitive or to become part of large corporations. When they offer special "package deals" and pre-need selling, it makes it harder and harder for grieving relatives to make decisions regarding the funeral of their loved one. All funeral directors should encourage those making arrangements to have a funeral Mass for their deceased family member. Also, it is best to discuss all funeral arrangements first with one's parish priest.

If cremation is chosen for economic reasons, it should be remembered that the differences in cost are relative only. There are still costs involved in the cremation itself and the services of the funeral home. It is a good idea to ask funeral directors about these costs, even when there is no funeral imminent.

If one is making the final arrangements for oneself, one may be tempted to spare friends and relatives the pain and expense of long, elaborate funeral ceremonies. But it should be remembered that they may need this opportunity to express their loss and their support of one another. All Christian people, pastors and other pastoral ministers, as well as funeral directors should be encouraged to make full use of the richness of the traditional Catholic funeral and burial rites—for the sake of our beloved dead and for the sake of those who mourn their loss.

Archdiocese of Kingston
POLICY FOR BURIAL OF CREMATED REMAINS

A - Introduction

Throughout human history most societies have treated the bodies of their deceased with the utmost respect. This is especially true in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The Book of Genesis (1.26-31) describes the human being as a creation of God, fashioned in the very image of God, and imbued with his own spirit of life.

Accordingly, Christians respect the body of the deceased because this person is a creation of God and a loved one. Burial customs of Christians differ widely, but common elements include a time for grieving and viewing the body, prayers for the deceased and for the mourners, and burial rites that involve placing the body or cremated remains in the earth, the depths of the sea or a designated place of resting.

B - Regulations

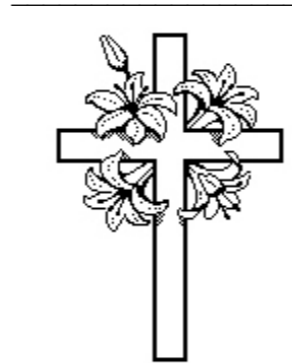
When the body of the deceased is cremated, the ashes are to be treated with the same respect as would be accorded to the body.

The following are regulations regarding the disposition of cremated remains for the Archdiocese of Kingston:

- (1) The body of the deceased is normally to be cremated only after the funeral Mass. If a request is made for cremated remains to be present during the Mass, the Chancery Office is to be informed of the request, with the reasons given.
- (2) The ashes are to be buried in the ground or in a columbarium as soon as possible. In the Catholic tradition the ashes of the deceased are to remain integral. It is not permissible to divide the ashes among family members or friends, or to place the ashes in articles to be worn or kept as mementos. Nor is it permissible to divide the ashes for interment in several locations.

- (3) The ashes are not to be scattered on land or sea.
- (4) Pastors are to request from the funeral director the name and place of the crematorium where the body of the deceased has been cremated and to record this information under “remarks” in the parish Death Register. Also to be recorded in the Register is the name of the cemetery of interment, if the place of burial is known.
- (5) When a funeral liturgy is celebrated in a parish or diocese other than the place of interment, both the parish of the place of the funeral liturgy and the parish of the place of burial are to record the appropriate information in the parish Death Register.
- (6) For purposes of accuracy, the “Date of Burial” heading in the parish Death Register is to be changed to “Date of Funeral Liturgy.”

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THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS



CREMATION

“We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them with him.” *1 Thess. 4.14*