

Answers to your questions...

Why are they changing the Rules on Cremation?

The rules that govern cremation after death for the Catholic Church are actually **not** changing! Since 1963 the Church has allowed cremation and since early 1997 it has allowed a funeral liturgy in the presence of cremated remains. Even with these options, the Church has always stressed the importance of **burying** the remains of the faithful, either the body or the cremated remains.

In recent times, the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries. Simultaneously, new and sometimes puzzling ideas contrary to the Church's vision of Christian burial have redirected the focus of Christian death (for example, cremated remains being used to make jewelry or other mementos).

Thus, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has deemed timely the publication of a new **Instruction**, with the intention of underlining, or re-emphasizing the doctrinal and pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms for the conservation of cremated remains.

Is the prohibition of scattering ashes or keeping them in the home new?

No. These are not new prohibitions. What the **Instruction** is emphasizing is the Church's ancient tradition of preferring that the bodies of the deceased be buried. Noting that there are reasons one might choose to be cremated, the Church holds to that tradition of burying remains, because of what we believe about the Resurrection—that one day, Christ will return in glory and our bodies will

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What should be done with the cremated remains of a deceased loved one?

Relief sculpture of
Christ's head on Calvary
Chapel in Calvary
Cemetery, Mankato



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be reunited but will be remade on that last day, sharing the Glory of the Risen Christ.

Because of this, it is inconsistent with this belief to scatter the cremated remains of our deceased (into the air, on the ground, or in bodies of water) or to divide them, or to keep them in homes.

The **Instruction** notes that “when, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose...From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian community's prayers and remembrance. Their tombs have become places of prayer, remembrance and reflection. The faithful departed remain part of the Church who believes ‘in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church’.”

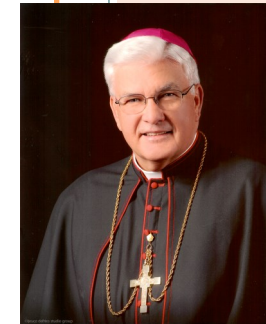
The Office of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Winona are always ready to assist families who are dealing with the death of a loved one, and if cremation has been chosen, the Cemeteries are able to provide options for burial or interment of the cremated remains.

Cremation in the Catholic Church

*Ad resurgendum
cum Christo*

**To Rise
With Christ**

On October 25, 2016, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an Instruction, *To Rise With Christ*, on the burial rites involving ashes/cremated remains of the deceased.



In issuing this Instruction, the Congregation noted that “the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries, but simultaneously new ideas contrary to the Church's faith have also become widespread.” Because of this the Instruction is intended to emphasize the “pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms pertaining to the conservation of ashes in the case of cremation.”

These regulations are designed to give you, the faithful, the sense of peace that can only come from knowing that your loved one is in such care and their human remains are interred in sacred ground.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend John M. Quinn

An Instruction
about burial
for the faithful

In Order to Rise with Christ, we must First Die with Christ.

The Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places.



Resurrection Garden at Calvary Cemetery in Mankato

Death is of course a time of sadness, for we mourn the earthly loss of our loved ones. However, as a people of faith, we also know that death is a time of joy, for we cannot be fully reunited with God until we pass from this world. Our faith teaches us that in death, life is changed, not ended. The funeral Rites of the Church reinforce the message of God's love for us, a love that conquers all things destroying even death itself.

(CF. Order of Christian Funerals #2-7)

In 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 their identity. Burial in a Catholic cemetery or other sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the faithfully departed, whose body, through the sacrament of Baptism, became a temple of the Holy Spirit. The burial of the dead is so important to the Church, that it is one of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. The earliest Christian churches and shrines were all built upon the graves of the saints and martyrs. It is this reverence for the burial of the Christian dead that compels us to examine the way we treat the cremated remains of our loved ones today.

■ **The ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place.**

The ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church (if properly authorized), or in an area designated as sacred by the Church for the purpose of interring/entombing the faithfully departed.

Columbariums at St. Mary's Cemetery in Winona



The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches us that there is a time and a place for everything. Catholic Cemeteries are designed to provide a sacred place to honor those who have gone before us. In honoring our deceased loved ones, we not only remember the special way that they have touched our hearts, but more importantly we remember the way God was able to touch their hearts. It is not enough to remember the good our loved ones have done, we must also entrust their body and souls into God's merciful goodness. The sacred ground of a Catholic Cemetery reminds us, that while we may not be perfect, we are perfectly loved by God who is all good and all loving.

■ **The conservation of the ashes of the faithfully departed may not be kept at home.**

The family home is certainly a place where the love of God dwells, however the sacred ground of a cemetery is perpetual. It is not enough for us to simply have a personal relationship with Jesus as our savior. Our faith is a communal faith; we rely upon the prayers of others. Interment in a Catholic Cemetery assures of the prayers of others until that day when we are together again in God's Kingdom. We cannot simply rely upon ourselves; we need the communion of saints and the communion of the faithful to lead us to God's presence. If you have cremated remains at home, please do not hesitate to contact a representative of a Catholic cemetery. They will be most helpful and compassionate.

■ **The cremated remains of the faithful must stay together and may not be divided among family members or scattered in nature.**

Our faith teaches us the importance of the sanctity of the body. Keeping cremated remains intact is a sign of respect for the physical body that was so important in life. The separation of cremated remains may have a short-term benefit for the bereaved, but it is not consistent with our faith. We believe that the body is a gift from God, a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. To be consistent in this belief, the body should be treated with the dignity and respect that can only come with proper burial.

Our cemetery staff is on hand to assist anyone with questions regarding situations in which a division of cremated remains, or the scattering of cremated remains, has already taken place. We do offer a variety of memorialization options for families choosing a sacred place even in the absence of intact cremated remains or the absence of any remains at all.

■ **It is not permitted that the ashes of the faithful be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or in any other objects.**

While these gestures may have appeared to have great sentiment, they are contrary to the understanding of Christian burial. All of these mementos may be buried in a Catholic Cemetery.

Bishop John M. Quinn blessing Columbariums at St. Mary's Cemetery in Winona

