

A Catholic Understanding of Cremation

Dealing with the death of a loved one is no easy task. As much as we attempt to prepare ourselves for the emotions, planning and interactions which arise at this time, we are always surprised by some feeling, detail or person we could not have anticipated.

Cremation is one of the details surrounding burial which generates mixed feelings and reactions in family, friends and community. This brochure hopes to provide information about cremation from both a secular and religious view. It hopes to bring comfort to a difficult time of decision making while upholding the Church's ongoing values.

The Church's great respect for the dignity of the human body as temple of the Holy Spirit and destined for glory in the resurrection of the dead, has traditionally focused on taking great care to prepare the bodies of the dead for burial. This is not always a view shared by our society which tends to shorten the period of mourning and to reduce or eliminate rituals in a misguided attempt to deny the reality of death and/or hope in eternal life. The Church wants to help our culture and more so, her members, to face death and to celebrate the victory over death, resurrection; to claim the hope which is ours, in Christ.

The 1917 Code of Canon Law forbade cremation. By 1963, it was allowed in cases of necessity and the new 1983 Code allowed cremation, while still recommending the burial of the body. While cremation is not as valued as burial of the body, the Church attempts to be sensitive to the pastoral, economic, geographic and family issues which make it a choice for nearly 20 percent of our people. Thus cremated remains are now allowed the full Funeral Rites of the Church.

Read this brochure carefully. Discuss your options with your parish bereavement team. Do what your loved one would want, in keeping with the Church's values of human dignity and hope of eternal life.

Peace Be With You!

(N.B. The asterisk symbol * indicates a word that is defined in the Glossary at end of brochure.)

1. ***What is the Church's position on cremation?***

"Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, the Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites."¹

2. ***What Funeral Rite options are available for cremated Catholics?***

The Church strongly prefers the presence of the body of the deceased at the Funeral Liturgy and recommends that cremation take place following the Funeral Liturgy, which includes the Mass of Christian Burial (Funeral Mass.) "In some cases it may be necessary for cremation to take place prior to the Funeral Mass. Funeral Rites are permitted to be celebrated with the presence of cremated remains.² This includes the Vigil for the Deceased, the Mass of Christian Burial, and the Rite of Committal.

3. ***Where should the Funeral Mass be celebrated?***

The Funeral Mass will normally be celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged; but, it is possible to choose any Catholic church for a Funeral Mass, provided the pastor of that church agrees and the pastor of the deceased has been informed.³ The Funeral Mass may also be celebrated in approved chapels of long-term care institutions and in other approved chapels. The Funeral Mass *may not* be celebrated in funeral homes or in cemetery chapels; however, the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass (see #4) may be celebrated in a funeral home or cemetery chapel.⁴

4. ***What is the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass?***

In the funeral Liturgy Outside Mass, the community gathers to hear the message of Easter hope proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word and to commend the deceased to God. Ordinarily celebrated in the parish church, the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, a funeral home, parlor, chapel of rest, or cemetery chapel. This rite may be used for various reasons:

- a. When the Funeral Mass is not permitted, namely, on solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season.
- b. When in some places or circumstances it is not possible to celebrate the Funeral Mass before the committal, for example, if a priest is not available.
- c. When for pastoral reasons the pastor and the family judge that the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass is a more suitable form of celebration.

5. ***Are Memorial Masses permitted?***

"It is not permitted in the Diocese of Orlando to schedule a Memorial Mass that is a Funeral Mass without a body or the cremated remains of a body present. In some unusual circumstance (e.g., donation of a body to medical science, a disaster where a body has been lost or destroyed) permission may be requested of the bishop for the celebration of a Funeral Mass without human remains present. Permission must be asked in each individual circumstance through the Office of Liturgy."⁵

6. ***What are the interment options for cremated Catholics?***

"Unless serious reason prevents it, the cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium."⁶

7. ***Is scattering of ashes permitted by the church? Does the Church allow ashes to be divided among family members?***

In the Diocese of Orlando, "the practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground or keeping cremated remains in the homes are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires."⁷

8. ***What is the State of Florida law regarding cremation?***

According to Florida law, cremation can take place after all of the following conditions have been met:

- a. Civil and medical authorities have issued all required permits or documents.
- b. All necessary next-of-kin authorizations have been obtained and no objections have been raised.
- c. Forty-eight (48) hours have transpired since the death occurred.

9. ***What are the standard cremation procedures?***

After any ceremonies or viewing have been completed, the deceased is placed in a casket or alternative container* which is placed into a cremation chamber. Intense heat and flame incinerates the container and its contents. The cremated remains are then removed from the cremation chamber and placed into the designated container for burial.

10. ***What questions should be asked to determine the level of service offered by a provider?***

- a. When a person is to be cremated after the funeral services, are there options other than purchasing a casket? *Yes.* Can a casket be rented for use during funeral services? *Yes. Speak to your funeral director.*
- b. What options are available for burial of cremated remains if there is no family plot?
 - 1) Purchase a cremation plot at a local cemetery or at the Catholic cemetery in Sanford or Palm Bay.
 - 2) Check with your parish to see if there is a memorial garden.
 - 3) For qualified veterans, free burial is available at any national cemetery.
- c. What are the costs related to cremation? *Costs can vary greatly. Funeral directors must make prices available over the telephone.*
- d. What is the difference between a temporary container* and an alternative container*?
- e. See Glossary.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Alternative Container - A nonmetal receptacle or enclosure which is less expensive than a casket and of sufficient strength to be used to hold and transport a dead human body. This is used before a cremation in lieu of a casket, but not after a cremation.

Columbarium - An assembly of niches designed to hold containers of cremated remains located most often in a mausoleum with a cemetery.

Cremation and remains - The process of reducing the body to ashes and bone fragments through intense heat which, depending on the size of the body, will weigh three to nine pounds.

Direct Disposal Establishment - A facility registered under state law to practice cremation of human remains without preparation of the human remains by embalming and without any attendant services or rites such as funeral or graveside service or the making of arrangements for such final disposition.

Direct Disposer - Any person registered to practice direct disposition (cremation) in this state. Direct disposers are not authorized or permitted to conduct or arrange funeral services of any kind.

Final Disposition - According to Florida State Law, the final disposal of a dead human body can be by earth interment, above ground interment, cremation, burial at sea, or delivery to a medical institution for lawful dissection. In cremation, families must choose a manner for disposition of cremated remains.

Funeral Home - A facility or establishment registered under state law where a funeral director or embalmer practices funeral directing or embalming.

Funeral Mass - Mass of Christian Burial. It is a prayer for God's mercy for the deceased and a solace for the living and does not presume a life of exemplary faith or virtue. The Church encourages the celebration of this Mass for its deceased members.

Osuary - A mass grave in which ashes are scattered and unrecoverable.

Outer Interment Receptacle - Container or vault in which urn is placed for burial.

- f. What is a suitable container for my loved one's cremated remains? *In choosing a suitable container, families have two options:*
- 1) An urn or other suitable container purchased from a funeral home or provided by the family itself. (Note: The term "suitable container" excludes such things as plastic or paper bags, cardboard boxes).
 - 2) The temporary use of a suitable wooden box provided by the church for use during the Funeral Mass.
11. **What role does the parish play in assistance during this time?**
- a. The parish office staff communicates with the funeral home and offers assistance in contacting a priest to set times for Vigil for the Deceased, Funeral Mass, and Rite of Committal.
 - b. The parish priest affords the opportunity for both private prayer and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for family members; presides at the Funeral Mass. A priest or deacon ordinarily presides at the Vigil and Rite of Committal although a delegated bereavement lay minister can preside.
 - c. The parish bereavement ministry represents the parish in offering sympathy and support; offers assistance in planning Vigil for the Deceased and Funeral Mass, i.e., arranges for musicians, helps family select appropriate music and readings and is present at the funeral, coordinates with funeral director, provides a reception for family and friends of the deceased, takes care of other details as needed, provides follow-up resources. This ministry also helps families with funeral pre-planning on request.
 - d. The parish community offers support through prayer and hospitality to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, and often members attend the funeral services.

Rite of Committal - A ritual procession to the final resting place of the deceased; the final act of caring for the deceased by burial of remains in a cemetery or columbarium.

Temporary Container - When an urn is not provided for the cremated remains, the crematory will place the cremated remains in a container they furnish. This temporary container is not suitable for funeral masses or shipment.

Urn - Receptacle which holds the cremated remains as described in question number ten (10).

Vigil for the Deceased - The Christian community gathers to keep watch with the family, listens to the Word of God, and offers prayer for the deceased. The Vigil is a liturgical service requiring a presider, a reader and a minister of music. Traditional devotions and prayers such as the rosary may be held in addition to the vigil service, but never in place of it. The Vigil *may* be celebrated in the parish church, the home of the deceased, in a funeral home parlor or chapel.

Endnotes

1. Order of Christian Funerals including Appendix 2: Cremation No.413
2. Diocese of Orlando, Guidelines: Special Circumstances A - Cremation
3. Canon 1177 Code of Canon Law
4. Canon 1179 Code of Canon Law
5. Diocese of Orlando, Guidelines: B - The Funeral Liturgy #3
6. Order of Christian Funerals including Appendix 2: Cremation - #427
7. Diocese of Orlando, Guidelines: Special Circumstances A - Cremation



DIOCESE OF ORLANDO

A Catholic Understanding

Cremation



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