



DIOCESE
of
TYLER

MEMORANDUM

To: Pastors and Administrators
From: Very Rev. John J. Gomez, Vicar General
Date: March 6, 2019
Subject: Policy for a Parish Columbarium

Dear Brother Priests,

I am pleased to share with you the attached policy which has been approved by Bishop Strickland.

This bishop has asked that I remind you that the construction of a columbarium is never to be undertaken for financial or fundraising purposes. Rather, it should only be considered if it will truly contribute to the spiritual good of the community and with the very clear understanding that caring for the remains of the dead is a most serious obligation to which the parish must be prepared to make a long-term, even permanent commitment.

Finally, please note that the construction of a columbarium is an act of extraordinary administration which requires approval by the diocesan bishop (c. 1281, §1-2).

Thank you.



DIOCESE of TYLER

Diocesan Policy for a Parish Columbarium

Effective March 6, 2019

The Catholic Church demands that mortal remains be treated with the greatest respect. This corresponds to the Christian belief that through baptism our bodies have become temples of the Holy Spirit (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2300).

For this reason, the Church strongly prefers and earnestly recommends that the body be present for the Vigil for the Deceased and the Funeral, then immediately taken to the cemetery for the Rite of Committal and interment (*Order of Christian Funerals*, 413).

Nevertheless, as long as it is not chosen to reflect a denial (even implicitly) of Christian beliefs, cremation is not prohibited when necessary for sanitary, economic, or social reasons. When cremation is chosen, it is preferable that the body be cremated after the Funeral (*OCF*, 418). As a last option, if necessary, the body may be cremated beforehand and the cremated remains be present in a dignified urn for the Funeral and other rites.

Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased, even if cremated, be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places (cc. 1240, §1; 1241, §1; *OCF*, 417). 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 their identity. The burial of the faithful departed in cemeteries or other sacred places also encourages family members and the whole Christian community to pray for and remember the dead.

The cremated remains of a body must be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they came (*OCF*, 417). Although it has become popular in recent decades, the Church definitively prohibits keeping the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence. Further, in order to avoid confusion with beliefs of pantheism, naturalism or nihilism which are contrary to Christianity, it is never permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects (Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of October 25, 2016).

In light of this and considering the strong desire among the faithful for their final resting place to be in a Catholic cemetery or other sacred place, columbaria are permitted on church property in the Diocese of Tyler according the following norms (c. 1243):

1. The pastor, having consulted with the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council, must obtain the bishop's written permission prior to initiating the process for the building of a columbarium on parish property. The construction of a columbarium must follow all diocesan financial and construction guidelines.

Part of the consultation process by the pastor must include researching the possibility for a Catholic cemetery. If it is possible to build a Catholic cemetery, this should be done in all cases. A columbarium can then be placed in the cemetery.

2. The pastor shall appoint a Columbarium Committee of at least five members whose responsibility it is to oversee and manage the columbarium. Their specific duties will be listed in the by-laws (see No. 3).
3. Parish columbarium by-laws are to be written and submitted to the diocesan chancellor for review and approval by the bishop.
4. The columbarium may not be located within the interior of the parish church (c. 1242).
5. Plans for maintenance and security (protection against vandalism, theft, etc.) must be developed by the parish.
6. There should be a crucifix erected at the columbarium (BB 1418). Consideration may also be given to the construction of an outdoor altar at the site of the columbarium so that Mass may be celebrated there.
7. Where applicable, the building of a columbarium must strictly adhere to city, county, and state codes and requirements.
8. A contract for each inurnment is to be signed by both the pastor and the purchaser.
9. All monies related to the columbarium must be kept separate in a separate account from those of the parish.
10. The columbarium must be self-supporting and not, in any way, dependent on parish funds. Pastors and parishes must understand the long-term obligations created by the construction of a columbarium and ensure that this will not tax the administrative and operational resources of the parish.
11. A trust fund for the perpetual care of the columbarium must be established with the East Texas Catholic Foundation. Twenty percent (20%) of the sale of each niche must be placed in this perpetual care fund. The diocesan development office can assist in this process.
12. The columbarium may be used only for the inurnment of human remains. It is never permitted to place the remains of any pet or other animal in the columbarium.
13. All inurnments in the columbarium must be carried out according to the approved liturgical books of the Roman Rite (cf. *Rite of Committal*). This applies even when the funeral takes place at another location or even when there is no funeral Mass.
14. The name of the deceased is to be inscribed, in an appropriate way consistent with the design of the columbarium, at each niche in order to record, with dignity, the memory of the deceased (*OCF*, 417).
15. The pastor must offer regular catechesis to his people so that they understand the strong preference of the Church for the burial of the bodies with full liturgical services. The presence of a columbarium on parish property should never reflect a preference for cremation over burial of corporeal remains.
16. Upon completion, the columbarium is to be blessed in the manner prescribed by the liturgical books.

