

St. Matthew Catholic Church
2800 Pine Tree Road, Longview, TX

Columbarium - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. May Catholics be cremated?

Yes. In May 1963, the Vatican's Holy Office (now the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith) lifted the prohibition forbidding Catholics to choose cremation. This permission was incorporated into the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 (Canon # 1176), as well as into the Order of Christian Funerals. It then became standard practice to celebrate the funeral liturgies with the body and then take the body to the crematorium. Most recently the bishops of the United States and Holy See have authorized the celebration of a Catholic funeral liturgy with the cremated remains when the body is cremated before the funeral.

The Church encourages placement of the cremated remains in a sacred final resting place.

2. Isn't cremation against the tenets of the Catholic Faith?

No, but *theologically, the Roman Catholic Church maintains a preference for bodily burial rather than cremation.* That preference should be reflected in all literature regarding the columbarium. The Roman Catholic Church does, however, *recognize cremation and inurnment in a columbarium as an alternative for bodily burial subject to certain requirements of canon law of the Roman Catholic Church.* In particular, Canons 1184, 1210, 1213 and 1243 and perhaps others, and diocesan law, statutes, and policy regarding crematories and/or columbaria must be adhered to in the establishment, maintenance and use of a columbarium. **The Church prefers that the body be present for the final burial rites with cremation following later unless circumstances dictate otherwise.**

Can. 117 S 1 – Christ's faithful who have died are to be given a Church funeral according to the norms of law.

S2 – Church funerals are to be celebrated according to the norms of the liturgical books. In these funeral rites the Church prays for the spiritual support of the dead, it honors their bodies, and at the same time it brings to the living the comfort of hope.

S3 – The Church earnestly recommends that the pious customs of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless it is chosen for reasons that are contrary to Christian teaching.

A common practice is the entombment of the cremated remains in a "columbarium".

3. Why have a Church Columbarium? Did the Church change its practices?

The Church has traditionally been the natural repository and final resting place of deceased members of the Christian community. Burial within the church itself or in the adjacent churchyard was once common practice.

The amount of land necessary for a burial ground is no longer available to most churches, and a myriad of laws and regulations make it extremely difficult to establish a burial site. In recent years, cremation with inurnment of the cremated remains, rather than burial, has become more common. In this way, the remains of the deceased can remain at the church ground that played such an important part in their lives.

Also, many people are turning to cremation as an economical, dignified way to address the rising cost of funerals.

4. What is a Columbarium?

A Columbarium is a group of niches, typically within a wall, or other structure of brick, stone, granite, marble or other materials, that contains the cremated remains of the departed in a “worthy vessel”. The St. Matthew Columbarium will initially have three structures with 94 niches each, for a total of 282 niches. CHRISTUS Good Shepherd Medical Center will also share or retain one or more structures within the Columbarium for its use. The initial Columbarium design ultimately provides for 12 structures, for a total of 1,128 niches. Each niche can accommodate up to two urns, for a total of 2,256 remains. The Columbarium design can accommodate additional niche structures as needed.

5. What are the benefits to Parishioners?

A niche in the Columbarium is modestly priced, aesthetically pleasing, and ecologically sound. The ambiance of the Columbarium creates a comfortable meeting place for families and friends to gather in love and remembrance, a consoling link between life and death.

6. Who can be interred?

The Columbarium is reserved for the use of members of the clergy, current and former members of Saint Matthew’s Parish, and their families as defined in the Columbarium Rules and Regulations. Other Catholic churches in the East Texas area are also included: St. Mary’s, St. Anthony’s, St. Francis of Assisi, and Saint Theresa’s Churches. Non-Catholic family members are welcomed.

Baptized persons, including non-Catholics, from the community at large may also be interred with the approval of the Columbarium Committee. Only human remains may be interred.

7. May a particular niche be chosen?

Yes, niches are offered on a “first come, first served” basis. The cost varies by size and according to location. However, niche units are only added periodically as needed, so the number, size, and location of niches to choose from at a given time may be limited.

8. How are the niches marked?

Each granite niche cover is engraved with the person’s legal name and dates of birth and death. These are inscribed in a uniform size and arrangement after the time of inurnment.

9. What if the family wants more information than just names and dates on the niches?

Space limitations and the need for inscription uniformity restricts the information on the niche face to just the names and dates of the deceased. If the family desires a more descriptive and creative memorial; the Columbarium also offers Memorial Paving Stones for purchase and engraving. These granite stones placed in the pavement are approximately 24” X 24” in size and can be engraved with names, artistic designs, symbols, verses, or other information to commemorate a person inurned in the Columbarium, or a family member or loved one interred at another location. The cost of the stones are currently \$300 plus engraving.

10. Who is paying for the Columbarium?

The Columbarium is funded and maintained solely by the sale of the niches over time, and from donations. No money is drawn from Church funds.

11. What is the cost of inurnment in the Columbarium?

The cost of a niche is dependent upon the size and location of the niche chosen. The Columbarium Contract price is inclusive of all inurnment costs, including urns, engraving,

perpetual maintenance, etc. The current total Columbarium Contract cost is listed in the most recent applicable Columbarium Contract.

In addition to the Columbarium Contract cost, there are addition costs independent of the Columbarium.

A funeral home must be contacted for “direct cremation” if inurnment is planned at the Columbarium. This may include minimal services of the funeral home staff, removal of the remains from home or hospital and cremation of the remains. *These costs are separate from the Columbarium and are negotiated with the funeral home.* The funeral home will also arrange for the death notice and copies of the death certificate for which they charge a fee.

Additional cost may be incurred if the family chooses a traditional viewing at a funeral home and having the body present for the funeral mass. Embalming is required as well as other costs such as facility fees, body preparation, clothing and a rental casket for the service.

12. How is the Contact cost of a niche determined?

The Columbarium Committee has the task of determining price levels sufficient to 1) pay for the initial Columbarium construction over time, 2) pay for the niche structure in use, 3) create a Trust Fund for perpetual care, and 4) provide partial funding of the next (future) purchase of niches. The Pastor and Columbarium Committee approves the pricing. The pricing levels are dependent upon the size and location of the niche, and are published in the current Columbarium Contract.

13. How do I reserve a niche?

Contact Saint Matthew’s Parish Office and they will provide assistance in completing the “Columbarium Niche Purchase Application Form”, selecting a niche, completing the Columbarium Contract, and accept payment of the appropriate amount. Refer to the Columbarium Rules and Regulations for the details regarding selection of niches.

14. Are there some niches set aside for unexpected inurnment needs?

The plan for the ongoing installation of additional niche structures is such that there should be a limited number of unsold niches available at any time.

CHRISTUS Good Shepherd Health System has columbarium niches reserved for their use.

15. Is there a different price for the sale of niches during construction before dedication?

In order to collect sufficient funds prior to the completion of the Columbarium project, a specific effort will be made to secure Columbarium Contracts (sell niches) in advance of the Columbarium dedication ceremony on September 8, at a price approximately twenty percent (20%) less than the normal published price referenced in item 11 above. Once the Columbarium is dedicated on September 8, 2020 (The Feast of the birth of the Blessed Mother), the discounted sale of niches will end.

Niche selection will be determined by the order in which the completed applications are received by the Committee as per the published Rules and Regulations. Each Purchaser will be contacted in order. After location selection, the next Purchaser will be contacted.

16. Can I surrender, transfer, or assign an unused niche?

The Purchaser may surrender an **unused** niche for a full refund of the price of the niche and urns as per the published rules and regulations. The engraving cost will not be refunded, but will rather be retained by the Committee as an administration fee.

The Purchaser may transfer or assign an **unused** niche with the approval of the Committee as per the published Rules and Regulations. Rights to a niche **may NOT** be sold.

17. What are the regulations for purchase of a Memorial Paving Stone?

A Memorial Paving Stone can commemorate any deceased relative of a current or former Parish member. Parish members with burial arrangements elsewhere can be remembered in this way, as can deceased parents or other special relatives. Information in the Columbarium records indicates the relationship of the Memorial Stone to the Parish member. A separate contract is required for the purchase of a Memorial Stone.

Memorial Paving Stone costs are yet to be determined. The total cost shall include fixed and variable costs. Fixed costs include the actual cost of the stone, the installation of the stone, a small portion of the Columbarium construction cost, and a small portion of the perpetual care costs. Variable costs are the specific requests for engraving on the stone by the Purchaser.

18. Who will administer the activity of the Columbarium?

The Columbarium Committee reports directly to the Pastor. The Committee is responsible for Columbarium management and finances. (Ref. Canon Law on Cremation)

19. What about care and permanency?

The Columbarium will have perpetual care funded through the sale of the niches. A Columbarium Trust Fund will be created, and managed by the East Texas Catholic Foundation. Monetary gifts may be specified and made directly to the Trust Fund for perpetual care.

The Pastor and a 5-member Committee of the Parish oversee the care. The Columbarium is the property of St. Matthew Church and the legal title is held by the Bishop of Tyler. The Office of the Bishop assures permanent care.

20. Do I need to ask permission to be cremated?

No, but it is a good idea to discuss your family's wishes with your pastor, deacon or other parish minister. Don't forget to address your wish to be cremated with your family. Put your directive in writing in the form of a will, living trust or pre-needs planning document.

21. Who decides if I am to be cremated?

In most cases you make the decision to be cremated. However, your survivors may decide to have you cremated, generally due to special family circumstances.

22. How do I make my wishes known?

If you desire that your body to be cremated you can make those wishes known in your will and in documents designed to help plan and prepare your funeral.

The possession of a Columbarium Contract prior to death is an affirmation of your wishes.

23. Do I have to honor my parents or spouse's wish to cremate them?

Out of respect for loved ones, you will want to do all you can to may carry out the wishes of the deceased concerning funeral services provided they are in keeping with Church practice. Yet, you may keep in mind the therapeutic value to the family of celebrating the full funeral liturgy with the body present. This may significantly outweigh your reasons for cremation before the funeral liturgy.

24. How are arrangements for cremation and interment made?

Arrangements for cremation are made through a Funeral Home. Prior to going to the Funeral Home, a visit to Saint Matthew's Parish Office should be made to discuss the pending funeral, and confirm the inscription to go on the faceplate of the niche. The Funeral Home will return the urn with the cremated remains to you for the final inurnment services. Once you know when the cremated remains will be provided to you, the inurnment can be arranged. The Parish Office will

schedule the church services and inurnment. As per the discussion in item No. 2, **the Church prefers that the body be present for the final burial rites with cremation following later unless circumstances dictate otherwise.**

25. What length of time is there between death, cremation and the funeral Mass?

The answer to this question depends on various factors, just as in the case of funerals with the body. The place of death, the location of the crematory, scheduling a time for cremation, the schedule at the parish church, and other circumstances impact the timing.

The Parish Office can help determine a practical schedule.

26. Is there a funeral/committal service?

Yes, traditional services continue as usual in the Church, and include the committal service at the Columbarium. The burial service will be as prescribed by the Pastor, in consultation with the family, and in accordance with the regulations of the Diocese of Tyler. ***The preference of the Church is to celebrate the funeral rites with the body present prior to cremation.***

27. What funeral rites are celebrated when a person is cremated?

All the usual rites that are normally celebrated with a body present may also be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains. The United States' bishops have written new prayers and have printed them as an appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals. During the liturgies, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

28. What happens at the Funeral Mass with cremated remains?

During the Mass, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body. They are to be sealed in a "worthy vessel." The cremated remains vessel is carried in procession and/or placed on a table within the sanctuary, in front of the altar where the coffin would normally be, with the Easter candle nearby.

Significant attention should be given to the primary symbols of the Catholic funeral liturgy, as stated in the Order of Christian Funerals and its commentaries. The paschal candle and sprinkling with holy water are primary symbols of baptism and should be used during the funeral Mass. However, the pall is not used. Photos and other mementos may be used at the vigil; one large photo of the deceased may be used with the urn; but other photos are not appropriate for the Mass.

The body is always laid to rest with solemnity and dignity. So too, the Order of Christian Funerals provides for the inurnment of cremated remains (Order of Christian Funerals, #428).

29. May I scatter the ashes?

No, the ashes may not be scattered. "The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or 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, Appendix II)

The cremated remains should be placed in a sacred Columbarium.

30. Are Americans Increasingly Choosing Cremation?

The decision between cremating and burying loved ones remains a very personal one in the United States. Most people don't even like to discuss their plans for their final resting place until their later years. Even then, it comes down to finances, personal preferences and religious beliefs.

In 2006, 34% of deaths used cremation as the final disposition option. In 2010, the cremation rate was over 40 percent. This compares to 1% of all deaths a hundred years ago. The rate of cremation in the US continues to climb and is expected to reach over 50% in 2025.

31. What are the factors that contribute to this trend?

- More religions are accepting cremation.
- Many people do not feel the need to preserve their body.
- Some people dislike the idea of being buried.
- Cost considerations
- Cremation is very simple, especially “direct cremation” in which the body goes directly to the crematorium without embalming and viewing.
- People are increasingly less traditional.
- People are increasingly planning their own disposition.
- People are increasingly individualizing their memorials.
- Cremation removes the time constraint of full-body burial.
- Cremation allows remains to be easily transported to a remote location.
- Fewer people have reserved spaces in family burial plots.
- Crematoriums have used technology to considerably reduce emissions.
- More burial grounds are offering columbarium and ground vaults.
- On average, cremation burials are 20-25% of the cost of casket burials. The additional cost of casket burials is due to multiple factors.
- Probably one of the most important factors in this trend is the social affirmation. Cremation becomes more acceptable as more people choose it. Basically, people know that others have researched cremation prior to choosing it. People may also factor that society finds cremation acceptable.
- Casket burials:
 - Involve more parts; like caskets, markers, marker bases, liners, vaults, etc.
 - Involve more transportation
 - Require heavy equipment: ex. backhoe, lift, etc.
 - Traditionally involve a funeral home for viewing and burial
- Often involve a funeral package, which provides more services and more costs

32. What information about the Columbarium is on the Parish website?

The website is living document that will be updated to address questions about the Columbarium, its purpose, how to acquire a niche, and other information. The Columbarium Niche Purchase Application form may be downloaded, as well as other documents such as the Contract. Various documents such as location of deceased, Columbarium Rules and Regulations, etc. can be downloaded for personal use.

To view Columbarium information on the Saint Matthew website, click the “ABOUT” tab and then select “COLUMBARIUM”.