Frequently Asked Questions About Catholic Cemeteries

Who can be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

Catholic cemeteries have a long tradition of dedicated service to the Catholic faithful and community, including non-Catholic spouses, children, parents and other relatives. Christians with a connection to the Catholic Community may also be buried in Catholic Cemeteries.

Why should Catholics be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

It is only natural that those who share the same faith in life, should wish to carry on that sense of community in death. When it comes to the issue of death, the sensibilities and needs of Catholics are unique, and call for certain practices in the handling and care of the remains of the deceased. Therefore, in the blessed grounds of a Catholic cemetery there are safeguards – mandated by the Church’s Canon Law – which guarantee permanence, reverence and respect for the remains of the deceased.

In the laws of the Catholic Church, only two places are called “sacred”: those “designated for divine worship” and those reserved “for the burial of the faithful.” We easily recognize the sacredness of a church where the Eucharist and other liturgical functions take place. But oftentimes, people forget that the cemetery is equally holy, containing as it does, the last remains of the saints whose bodies have been temples of the Holy Spirit.
To preserve an atmosphere of dignity, peace, tranquility, and holiness, it is often necessary to establish and maintain norms, which will: (1) Protect the sacredness of the cemetery and the blessed remains which are interred there, lest they be desecrated or their memories dishonored; and, (2) Provide for a safe environment for volunteers, staff, parishioners, and visitors. These norms are not meant to be overly restrictive, but are for the benefit and safety of all. In observing the cemetery’s established norms, we help to keep the cemetery a sacred, final resting place for our loved ones in a holy, beautiful, and safe environment.

**Should I choose a crypt or a grave?**

Personal preference and/or family tradition(s) often influence choices in this regard. Certainly, this is something to discuss in further planning detail with a funeral director.

Every purchase of a cemetery burial plot is officially documented via the issuance of an interment certificate or “deed” issued to the purchaser, granting interment rights in the cemetery. It is not a deed with any accompanying “right to own the property” (e.g., one does not purchase the actual land or property (or mineral rights below)), but is a deed with an accompanying Right of Sepulture (e.g., a right of burial therein) for a specific burial plot space. The entire cemetery grounds and property remain that of the Diocese of Colorado Springs, as does the responsibility for its perpetual care.

**If I decide I no longer wish to be buried in the plot, may I simply sell it to someone else?**

No. Transfers of burial plot deeds, must be coordinated and approved with the St. Charles Borromeo Parish office, to ensure the cemetery’s records are updated and, if/as needed, the previously issued deed is voided and an updated plot deed is issued.

**Are there advantages to buying burial space before my family actually needs it?**

Yes. By completing pre-need arrangements, surviving Catholic families can avoid confusion and agonizing decision making during their time of bereavement, and assure our love ones of burial arrangements in the manner and location they desire.

**Should I buy space for the entire family?**

It has been our experience that generally, a husband and wife buy burial plots for themselves. Later on, many families then decide to purchase adjoining plots to form a family group. Buying family plots together, at the same time, is the most prudent and preferred method. Seeking adjacent burial plots to parents or siblings may not be available years later unfortunately; because they may already have been sold to other people.

**Do I have to pay a monthly maintenance fee?**

No. [The Calvary Cemetery has an established endowment fund which is specifically maintained for the perpetual care and upkeep of the cemetery. 100% of all burial plot purchase fees automatically go to the cemetery’s endowment fund. Additionally, during the year, funeral or memorial donations are placed in the endowment fund to fund future maintenance and upkeep costs for the cemetery grounds.]
How do I pay for my burial arrangements?

Cash or checks are honored for your convenience. At the time of burial plot purchase, the amount due must be paid in full however.

If I move after purchasing, can I get a refund?

Yes. The Calvary Cemetery will refund the amount you prepaid, once a notarized Release of Cemetery Deed (back to the church/cemetery) is received from the deed holder; unless the burial plot deed is properly retitled to another family member or spouse. [Please refer to the Calvary Cemetery’s Policy and Procedures Handbook for further details and requirements for the transferring of burial plot deeds.]

What kind of monument or headstone/marker can I purchase?

[Monuments, headstones and plot markers conform to the norms specified in the Calvary Cemetery’s Policy and Procedures Handbook. These norms are designed to both enhance the care and overall beauty and character of the cemetery.]

Is there any chance my grave will be re-sold after a specified number of years?

No. The purchaser has an exclusive and permanent right of use via an issued burial plot deed. This Right of Sepulture passes to direct blood heirs immediately after the death of the recorded deed owner, although the current spouse has the first right of burial. Normally, the surviving members of the decedent’s family (e.g., the estate planner) will be contacted regarding the intended disposition of any remaining purchased, yet unoccupied burial plot(s) (e.g., will they be retitled (deed transferred) to another surviving family member, etc.).

If the deed owner moves and thereafter cannot be contacted (including any heirs) by all reasonable means of communication, per State of Colorado law, after a period of 75 years (since the last recorded activity related to the burial plot), the plot shall be considered abandoned and revert back to the ownership and control of the cemetery.

What is cremation?

Cremation is the reduction of the body of a deceased person through a process that involves intense heat and evaporation. The cremated remains usually weigh 4 to 10 pounds. Within the Catholic Church, proper burial is required of all cremated remains (also called “cremains”) by placing them in an urn or other approved device, and the urn then buried; like a casket.

Is it necessary to get permission from my priest or bishop in order to be cremated?

No. It is not a requirement, but it may be helpful to discuss any lingering questions and/or decisions you may have with your pastor or priest. NB: The spreading or scattering of cremated remains or maintaining them in one’s home, work place, or in a storage location (i.e., anything other than a proper burial) are not acceptable practices within the Catholic Church.
Do Catholic Cemeteries accept cremated remains?

Yes. Although cremation represents a means of disposition preferred by many, it is not the “final disposition” – burial is. Human cremated remains still remain the body of the deceased – just in a different form. Thus, cremated remains are to be treated with the same dignity and respect as the “full” body is treated prior to cremation. They should be buried in a cemetery, as soon as possible, just as we bury a body in a casket. Honoring and respecting the dead by keeping their remains safe, undisturbed, and memorialized is a time honored faith tradition. It is important to be remembered. It also enables family members and future generations to visit the graves of deceased loved ones. Keeping the cremated remains on the proverbial “mantle at home” is not a proper burial of the person and often delays or prevents normal human healing or closure in one's mourning process.

Does the cemetery have copies of the death certificates?

No. The document kept on file at the cemetery is called a State of Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment “Authority of Final Disposition”. It is issued by the Health Department Registrar in the county in which the person died. Colorado State Law requires that a properly executed death certificate be presented to the county’s Health Department Registrar, who subsequently issues the “Authority of Final Disposition”. Cemeteries cannot complete a person’s burial without this issued document and must keep a copy permanently on file in the cemetery’s records. Actual death certificates may be obtained from the registrar in the county in which the death occurred.

If I’m divorced and remarried can I be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

Yes. For more information, or if you have additional questions, please contact your parish priest.

Can someone who committed suicide be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

Yes. It is recognized that those who die from the act of suicide deserve our utmost prayers, understanding and compassion. Oftentimes, the deceased may have been suffering from a serious psychological instability, or overwhelming despair, depression, fear and/or confusion. Therefore, the Church offers funeral and burial rites for those who have died in such circumstances and we pledge to honor the departed and provide consolation to their family.

(SR: Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Archdiocese of San Francisco
http://www.holycrosscemeteries.com/faq/) (original basic document)