

# MYTHS & TRUTHS ABOUT CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

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**The Catholic Church is filled with mysteries, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the mystery of Jesus rising from the dead, etc. While our Catholic cemeteries are not mysterious there are persistent myths that surround them and often cause confusion. The following is an attempt to set the record straight.**

**Myth:** The Catholic Church doesn't allow cremation.

**Truth:** In Vatican II the church stated it still preferred burial of the body because it more fully exemplifies our belief in resurrection of the body on the last day. However it also stated that cremation was an acceptable alternative for final disposition of the body as long as it was not done in an attempt to deny resurrection.

**Myth:** Once cremated, ashes can be divided among family members, scattered in various places such as a favorite hunting spot or garden, scattered on the ocean, etc. They can be turned into various keepsakes, like rings and pendants, or a small amount can be kept in a locket and worn around one's neck.

**Truth:** Cremated remains must be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body and must be buried or entombed, preferably in a Catholic Cemetery, intact and in a suitable vessel to await resurrection. Cremated remains may be buried at sea such as in the case of John F. Kennedy, Jr. but again they must be intact and in a suitable vessel. Catholic cemeterians cannot and will not knowingly bury partial cremated remains in our cemeteries.

**Myth:** I can hold onto my spouse's ashes until I die and they can be mixed together before burial.

**Truth:** Cremated remains cannot be comingled. Each of us is an individual child of God and we belong to him and no one else. Catholic cemeterians can no more bury co-mingled ashes than we could bury two bodies in the same casket.

**Myth:** When one "buys a lot" in the cemetery they own the land and can do with it what they wish.

**Truth:** One does not "buy a lot", one purchases burial rights. Much like you would buy mineral rights or water rights, our Catholic cemeteries sell burial rights, which provide a license and Easement for a specific number of burials (traditional or cremation) in a specific location within the cemetery. The Easement also provides for a memorial to be erected in accordance with cemetery regulations and for perpetual care to maintain the lot in perpetuity. By selling burial rights rather than land there is no question of taxable property, we are assured the property will always remain a cemetery and it allows the management to set reasonable rules and regulations to assure proper maintenance of the cemetery can be performed.

**Myth:** Non-Catholics can't be buried in Catholic cemeteries.

**Truth:** Prior to Vatican II non-Catholics could not be buried in Catholic cemeteries. In fact, even Catholics had to be in good standing with the church and often times a letter from the pastor stating you were in good standing was required. Since Vatican II anyone can be buried in a Catholic cemetery and may have a service conducted by a priest or minister of their own faith. The cemetery is not obligated to and may not be able to meet special requirements of other faiths. All people wishing to be buried in Catholic cemeteries must be willing to abide by the rules and regulations set forth by the cemetery and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland.

**Myth:** I can sell my lot if I choose not to use it.

**Truth:** Your lot can be transferred to other individuals through the cemetery office but you cannot sell that which you do not own. If an individual "sells" his/her lot to another person and does not transfer rights through the cemetery office the sale is invalid and the buyer would be out whatever they paid.

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**Myth:** If I give my Easement to a relative or friend he or she will inherit burial rights after my death.

**Truth:** Possession of the Easement does not constitute ownership. If you wish to assign a specific grave space to an individual or transfer remaining burial rights to someone it can be accomplished by contacting the cemetery office and filling out standard documents. If documents are not completed and filed with the cemetery office remaining burial rights are automatically passed down to the next of kin in equal portions in accordance with state law.

**Myth:** Graves are six feet deep.

**Truth:** The grave is between four and a half feet and five feet deep, leaving about 18 inches of soil over the concrete vault cover. Six feet under is reserved for the movies.

**Myth:** In winter burials are not made because of the snow and frozen ground. Bodies are stored in a temporary tomb and buried in the spring.

**Truth:** In most cemeteries located in colder climates that is the case. This restriction is for liability reasons because the conditions in the cemetery are slippery and can be hazardous.

**We hope this article was helpful in better understanding the cemeteries we service today.**

**If you have any other questions you would like an answer to please bring it to any of your local cemetery council members and they will insure an answer is found for you.**

**Parish of the Precious Blood  
Cemetery Committee.**