

Clarification on Church Law Regarding Christian Burial and Cremation

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith recently issued a new instruction on Christian burial, with a particular emphasis on ashes and cremation. The document affirms the Church's traditional preference for burial of bodies of the deceased, while making clear that cremation is a legitimate choice when it is done for sanitary, economic, or social reasons, and it is not chosen out of a denial of Christian doctrine on the resurrection of the body.

The document issues a number of directives about cremation:

- Cremation must never violate the explicitly-stated or the reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful.
- Scandal and religious indifferentism must be avoided in the disposition of the ashes.
- Ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or other dedicated place for this purpose.
- Ashes may not be scattered, reserved in a private home, divided among family members, or preserved in mementos or jewelry.

These directives are clarifications of the already existing laws of the Church, and so they are consistent with the current policy of the Archdiocese.

The document provides a reminder that these restrictions on the “reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensure that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away. Also it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.”