

Series 2500 - *Archdiocesan Policy on
Cremation*
(Cemetery Department)

ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY ON CREMATION

2510 INTRODUCTION:

Throughout its two thousand year history the Church through its teaching, tradition and liturgy has placed strong emphasis on the sacredness and respectful care which should be shown to the bodily remains of the deceased. This reverence and care for the dead has been reflected clearly in our Catholic funeral and burial rituals as well as in the Christian burial practices and prayerful remembrance of our deceased.

In 1963 the Church modified its long-standing prohibition of cremation. The new directives allowed cremation to be chosen provided the choice did not reflect a denial or doubt about the Church's teachings or traditions about life, death or resurrection. The Code of Canon Law (Can. 1176, No. 3) states: "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching." Canon 1184 directs that: "unless they have given some signs of repentance before their death, the following are to be deprived of ecclesiastical funeral rite . . . (2°) persons who have chosen the cremation of their own bodies for reasons opposed to the Christian faith."

With these changes in the matter of cremation some confusion and many questions have arisen among our Catholic people. For pastoral reasons it is essential that our people know the law and be familiar with what is appropriate for liturgical services and burial of cremated remains.

2520 SERVICES:

Ideally, the wake service and funeral Mass are offered with the body present followed by cremation and proper burial or entombment of the cremated remains. If cremation takes place immediately after death, the cremated remains must not be present in the church for a funeral Mass. (Sacred Congregation of Sacraments and Divine Worship - Cremation and the Funeral Mass - January 1977).

2530 BURIAL:

Cremated remains should be buried or entombed in compliance with the directives which are prescribed in the Christian Burial Guidelines for the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The scattering of cremated remains or the keeping of them in a place other than a cemetery are practices which are not in keeping with the Church's long tradition of respectful care for the proper burial of the bodily remains of our deceased; cremated remains should be buried or entombed. The prescribed burial ritual should be used at the cemetery for the burial or entombment of the cremated remains.

2540 CONCLUSIONS:

Pastorally, it is important that our people receive proper instruction on the teaching and practices of our Church in the matter of cremation. Some of our people have experienced a great deal of unnecessary tension and pain because of decisions made about cremation based on misconceptions or ignorance. Hopefully, appropriate instruction and good counselling will help to minimize some of these problems.



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

445 CHURCH STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94114-1799 (415) 565-3600

September 30, 1997

Dear Father,

The Church's belief in the sacredness of the human body and the resurrection of the dead has traditionally been expressed in the particular care taken to prepare the bodies of the deceased for burial. However, today in the United States cremation has become a significant part of Catholic practice as well.

In response to this new pastoral situation, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, on August 6, 1996, requested from the Apostolic See an indult to permit the diocesan bishop to allow the presence of the cremated remains of the body at the funeral liturgy in dioceses of the United States. This indult was granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on March 21, 1997.

Therefore, while I call to attention the Church's strong preference that the body of the deceased be present at the funeral rite, it is my decision to permit the practice of allowing the presence of cremated remains of the body at funeral liturgies in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

In order to meet the particular pastoral demands presented by the presence of cremated remains of a body at the funeral liturgy, appropriate texts and ritual adaptations were prepared as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. This appendix was approved by the NCCB in plenary assembly on November 12, 1996, and subsequently confirmed by decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on July 30, 1997.

On the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1997, this appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals* may be published and used in funeral rites in the presence of the cremated remains of a body. From All Souls Day, November 2, 1997, its use is mandatory. The same three publishers that produced editions of the *Order of Christian Funerals* have advised the NCCB that the appendix should reach the market on or about the effective date.

A copy of the NCCB statement *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites* will be sent when available to assist you within this new pastoral situation. Please do not hesitate to call Father Talesfore in the Office of Worship with any questions you may have in this regard.

With sincere gratitude for your devoted attention to all the pastoral needs of the faithful, I am particularly grateful for the care you show for the deceased and those who grieve. In your faithful witness to the Risen Lord, the Church proclaims: "When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *William J. Levada*

Most Reverend William J. Levada
Archbishop of San Francisco