

CLIFF NOTES

by Fr. Clifford Smith

St. Mark's Columbarium

What is a Columbarium?

A columbarium (*columbaria for more than one*) is a place for the respectful and usually public housing of urns holding a deceased's cremated remains. The term comes from the Latin *columba* (*dove*) and originally referred to compartmentalized housing for doves and pigeons. The columbarium provides a rare opportunity to reclaim the church tradition of a burial place adjacent to the parish church. Church columbaria continue that tradition. Today, churches throughout the United States and Canada are finding that columbaria contribute to a feeling of church family. Be it Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday or regular Sabbath services, the congregation - past and present - is together in body and spirit.

Does Catholic law regarding burials allow for cremation?

Once banned for Catholics, cremation has been allowed since the late 1960's, if it is done in keeping with the church's respect for the body. While the Church "*earnestly recommends ... the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased,*" according to the **1983 Code Canon Law** Book IV, Part II, Title III Can. 1176 §3 states: "*The Church ... does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching.*" Earlier church laws against cremation developed centuries ago as a reaction to pagan beliefs. During that time, pagans would cremate the dead, believing that all life for that person was over. In fact, Christian martyrs were cremated by pagans so as to deny them the resurrection of the body. Catholicism therefore forbade cremation as a way to affirm its belief in the resurrection of the body. Another important change within church doctrine came in 1998 when cremated remains were allowed into the church for a funeral service. Prior to this, cremation had to take place after the funeral. The church, however, does not allow for scattering of ashes at any location. The Code of Canon Law also requires the Catholic Church to perpetually maintain its places of burial. Hence, care will always be assured.

What is the Catholic Understanding of Cremation?

Dealing with the death of a loved one is no easy task. As much as we attempt to prepare ourselves for the emotions, planning, and interactions that arise at this time, we are always surprised by some feeling, detail, or person we could not have anticipated.

The Church's great respect for the dignity of the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit and destined for glory in the resurrection of the dead, has traditionally focused on taking great care to prepare the bodies of the dead for burial. This is not always a view shared by our society that tends to shorten the period of mourning and to reduce or eliminate rituals in a misguided attempt to deny the reality of death and/ or hope in eternal life. The Church wants to help our culture and more so, her members, to face death and to celebrate the victory over death, resurrection; to claim the hope which is ours, in Christ.

Where will St. Mark's Columbarium be located?

The St. Mark's Columbaria will be adjacent to the new entrance to the church on its southeast corner, just below the existing Memorial Garden. It will be composed of free standing units, enclosing a private prayer garden. Plans will be displayed in the foyer of the church in the very near future.

Locally, columbaria already exist or are in the building plans of several Catholic Parishes: St. Joseph's in Richardson, Prince of Peace in Plano, and St. Jude's in Allen.