

Holy Cross Catholic Parish

Frequently Asked Questions about a Catholic Columbarium

What is a Columbarium?

A Columbarium is a group of niches that contain the cremated remains of the departed. A niche is a designated space in the Columbarium that contains the ashes of one deceased individual. The remains are placed in an urn provided by the Parish and a brass faceplate engraved with the name of the individual, date of birth and date of death is attached to the individual niche. A niche in a Columbarium is modest in cost and ecologically sound. The design of the Columbarium invites solitary contemplation and meditation. It also becomes a peaceful gathering place for families and friends to assemble in prayer, love, and remembrance.

If the need arises, can the columbarium be expanded?

Yes, the modular structure and design of the Columbarium allows for future expansion or relocation.

As a Catholic, may I be cremated?

Yes, in May 1963, the Vatican's Holy Office (now the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith) lifted the prohibition forbidding Catholics to choose cremation. This permission was incorporated into the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 (Canon #1176), as well as into the Order of Christian Funerals. It then became standard practice to celebrate the funeral liturgies with the body and then take the body to the crematorium. Most recently, the bishops of the United States and Holy See have authorized the celebration of a Catholic funeral liturgy with the cremated remains when the body is cremated before the funeral.

Do I need to seek permission to be cremated?

No.

When should cremation take place?

The Church prefers that cremation take place after the full funeral liturgy with the body. However, in the American culture, cremation often takes place soon after death.

Is it necessary to embalm?

When cremation follows the funeral liturgy, embalming is usually necessary. When cremation follows soon after death, embalming is not necessary.

Is it necessary to purchase a casket for cremation?

No. The only thing required is a simple container in which the body can be transported and placed in the cremation chamber. If the body is present for the funeral liturgy, a casket is rented not purchased.

Must cremated remains be buried or entombed?

Yes. Burial options include a family grave in a cemetery marked with a memorial stone or an urn garden, a special section in a cemetery with small graves for urns, or a Columbarium.

May I scatter the ashes?

No. "The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires." (Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II)

May I bury the ashes at sea?

Yes. Burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea. The burial of cremated remains at sea in this manner seems to be an appropriate alternative to the long-standing and revered custom of a traditional burial at sea. Please consult your local government for environmental regulations. (See Order of Christian Funerals, #405.4).

Who decides if I am cremated?

In most cases you make the decision to be cremated. You can make those wishes known in your will and/or in documents designed to help plan and prepare your funeral.

What funeral rites are celebrated when a person is cremated?

All the usual rites, which are celebrated with a body present, may also be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains. The United States' bishops have written new prayers and have printed them as an appendix to the Order of Christian Funeral. During the liturgies, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

What length of time is there between death, cremation, and the funeral mass?

The answer to this question depends on various factors, just as in the case of funerals with the body. The place of death, the location of the crematory, scheduling a time for cremation, the schedule at the parish, and other circumstances all impact the timing. Once all arrangements have been made, you should generally allow at least one day between death and the celebration of the funeral liturgy.

What happens at the funeral Mass with cremated remains?

Significant attention should be given to the primary symbols of the Catholic funeral liturgy, as stated in the Order of Christian Funerals and its commentaries. The Paschal candle and sprinkling with holy water are primary symbols of baptism and should be used during the Funeral Mass. However, the pall is not used. Photos and other mementos may be used at the vigil but are not appropriate for the Mass. During the Mass, the cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body. They are to be sealed in a "worthy vessel", usually an urn. The urn is placed in an ossuary, a small wooden felt lined box, provided by the Parish. The ossuary may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the coffin normally would be with the Easter candle nearby. The body is always laid to rest with solemnity and dignity. So too, the Order of Christian funerals provides for the interment of cremated remains. (Order of Christian Funerals, #428).

If cremation is chosen is a funeral home called at the time of death?

It is your choice. If the body is to be present for the Funeral Mass, then a funeral home is called. If cremation is to take place soon after death, then a crematory or funeral home is called depending on your wishes.

Do I need to purchase a proper container for the cremated remains?

No. the urn is provided with the purchase of a niche in the Columbarium. Only the urn provided by the parish may be used in the Columbarium. All the urns are the same and are considered a worthy and proper container for cremated remains.

Does the Parish office need to be notified at the time of death?

Yes. Arrangements need to be made and the brass plate needs to be engraved for the niche in the Columbarium. The cost of the niche includes the nameplate and the engraving.