



June 5, 2020

Dear Members of the Land Use Commission, State of Hawai'i:

In 1963, at the threshold of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church lifted its prohibition against cremation of the body of the Catholic faithful. Prior to this time all Catholic cemeteries made available only graves for burial and mausoleums for full body entombment. Today, Catholics may either be buried in a full body casket or be cremated and placed in a grave or a niche.

In 1989, the *Order of Christians Funerals* was issued. This ritual book provided guidelines and prayers for various instances involving the cremation of the body of the deceased. These rituals now included prayers for the committal of cremated remains and for burial at sea.

Over these same years, Catholic cemeteries began developing places for the burial of cremated remains of the body, always conscious of showing respect and reverence for the body of the faithful.

Catholic cemetery designers became aware of our need to be good stewards of the earth... God's gift to us. Using the earth wisely has prompted engineers to lay out burial spaces so that an acre of land could accommodate 1450 graves (3'x8') at a single level with only 1" of space separating the outer concrete burial vault containing the casketed remains. An acre of land can also accommodate thousands of crypts (depending upon the height of the mausoleum) and many thousands of niches again depending upon the height of the niche walls or the placement of cremated remains in-ground. Cremation gardens have been developed which utilize a variety of options for the cremated remains of the body to be memorialized.

In respecting the earth, Catholic cemeteries have attempted to conserve the land that is designated for cemetery use. Also, the Church is very conscious of our need to care for the poor at the time of death. Catholic Charities in every diocese and archdiocese throughout the United States is committed to burying deceased persons with grace and dignity.

While a cremation niche may be designed to hold one or two cremated remains, a grave or a crypt may accommodate many cremated remains. Some states, such as Illinois, require that each burial/entombment of



cremated remains must be listed not only in the cemetery records but also on a state data base.

There are many possibilities in planning a funeral today. There are a number of choices to be made. For instance, a family of four may choose to buy a single grave with the intention that one family member chooses to be buried in a full-body casket, while the other three members wish to be cremated and placed in the same grave. That one grave can one day hold four family members. The use of graves for multiple burials is usually only limited by the cemetery rules and the ability to memorialize the names of the family members.

Cemeteries today need not be developed as huge tracts of land for graves and roadways. They need to be developed to serve the families of the community within which they are located. The State of Hawai'i is currently experiencing a 73% cremation (CANA, Cremation Association of North America) which is projected by CANA to be 85.9% by 2040. With that number of cremations presently, acreage required for grave space is minimal. The creation of cremation gardens and a variety of burial spaces for cremated remains is more preferable.

In the *Order of Christian Funerals*, section 406.4, provides prayers for those who have chosen cremation and wish to be buried at sea. Throughout the islands, committal services are held where friends gather at sea, placing the cremated remains in the ocean and throwing flowers and lei over the spot. For many families the tradition is to return at least annually to the same spot for remembrance, for prayer, and for placing a lei. The Church blesses this type of remembrance.

Tragedy does not eradicate hope. With those words, I reflect on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on our society related to cemeteries. People are feeling the effects of not being allowed to visit family members in nursing homes or hospitals; tragically not present at the bedside of a loved one as they die. Cemeteries on the mainland are experiencing an increase in families purchasing graves, crypts or niches in advance of need, sensing more than ever the inevitability of death. Creativity has come to the aide of families who must celebrate a funeral during the pandemic. Families who have chosen cremation are awaiting a future date when they can gather with a large number of family and friends to pray and to say farewell.

The tragedy of the pandemic is being addressed in myriad ways. Yet, families of faith are expressing hope as they say farewell to loved ones and reflect on their own mortality. Today, June 5th, 70 funerals are being celebrated in the Catholic cemeteries of Chicago. That number accounts for those choosing a Committal service with very few in attendance. How many more are awaiting a return to normalcy? What will be the “new normal” also applies to our faith-filled response to death. Families who have buried their loved ones during these past two months have done so without funeral home visitations and religious services in church. Will future requests focus only on the cemetery? Our ministry to the dying and to their families is already changing; our care for the dead is also changing. Our respect for life and our consolation for the grieving is evolving. All of us who are living through the pandemic are grieving the loss of so many aspects of our life that have changed. How we deal with that grief every day will shape our future.

I offer these reflections based on my 30 year career as the Archdiocesan Director of the Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The Catholic Cemeteries of Chicago consists of 44 cemeteries burying over 15,000 persons annually. Our staff of 256 make the ministry of burying the dead a source of great satisfaction and peace.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick J. Pollard", written in a cursive style.

Reverend Monsignor Patrick J. Pollard