

Diocese of Erie
P.O. Box 10397
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397

Office of the Bishop

February 2, 2012
Presentation of the Lord

RE: Cremation policy update

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Cremation has become a more frequent request by those making funeral arrangements for their loved ones. A recent study of the funeral industry found that nearly 37% of all Americans who died in 2009 were cremated. While the Catholic Church permits cremation under certain circumstances, the Catholic understanding of the reverence due to the body is to be extended to the cremated remains. Therefore, the spreading of ashes, the distribution of ashes among family members, or the mixing of ashes with those of other family members is prohibited.

The purpose of the enclosed brochure is to remind Catholics that a close connection exists between the deceased body and the cremated remains; both are to be treated with great respect. The brochure also seeks to encourage a thoughtful conversation between the pastor and the family when cremation is being considered. Ongoing proactive formation in parishes on Catholic funeral practices will be necessary to communicate an appropriate understanding of cremation for Catholics.

Following is a summary of the key Catholic principles concerning cremation:


- The presence of the body at a Mass of Christian Burial is highly valued. Therefore, it is preferable that cremation take place after the Mass of Christian Burial.
- Cremation should not be an automatic choice by the family or an immediate recommendation of the funeral director.
- Pastors must determine through pastoral conversation with the family whether cremation is advisable.

- Where it is necessary to cremate the body before the Mass of Christian burial, the cremated remains may be present at the Mass of Christian Burial.
- In this case, the rubrics of the Order of Christian Funerals, as modified for use with cremated remains, are to be used.
- Mass celebrated with cremated remains present is called a Mass of Christian Burial, not a Memorial Mass.

I ask that you please speak with your local funeral directors about these issues and leave samples of the enclosed cremation brochure with them. I also ask that you review these guidelines with your parishioners. Additional copies of the brochure for use in your parish or by the funeral homes may be printed online at: <http://www.ErieRCD.org/pdf/cremation.pdf>.

I thank you for your attention to the issues surrounding cremation and for your pastoral commitment to your people at a time of great sorrow and grief.

Fraternally yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL
Bishop of Erie

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DWT/jpp