



DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

CEMETERIES



DIocese OF AUSTIN

Guidelines for Catholic Cemeteries

Effective 2005

I. Article I: Purpose

- A. The reason for having Catholic cemeteries is more complex than one might think. In a special way, Catholic cemeteries stand as visible and dramatic reminders of and witnesses to the Christian understanding of life, death, and resurrection. The dead are laid to rest in the Catholic cemetery with prayerful dignity where they remain in an atmosphere permeated with all the devotion, reverence, and respect of our Catholic faith.
- B. In Canon Law and in theology, cemeteries, like churches, are consecrated as sacred places, designated for divine worship or for the burial of the faithful (c. 1205). It is the duty of the faithful of the Body of Christ to care for the needs of our brothers and sisters, both in spiritual and in physical matters. This obligation is recognized in Canon 1240 which mandates that churches have their own cemeteries or at least spaces in civil cemeteries that have been properly blessed and destined for the faithful departed.¹
- C. As sacred places, Catholic cemeteries must be maintained with the same diligence given to churches. The Church must be diligent in its efforts to care for these consecrated areas as holy resting grounds so that visitation by others for prayer and sacramentals may be accomplished in an appropriate manner.
- D. The Catholic theological tradition has always maintained that all are created by God, in His image. In life and in death, all stand equal before God. In life and in death, discrimination is alien to Catholic belief.

¹ Catholic cemeteries may provide for disposition of deceased Catholics by means of cremation (c. 1176). The remains of cremated bodies should be treated with the same respect given to corporeal remains of a human body. The cremated remains of a body should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. They may also be buried in a grave. Whenever possible, appropriate means for memorializing the deceased should be utilized, such as a plaque or stone that records the name of the deceased.

- E. In Canon 1243, the universal Church calls on dioceses to determine appropriate norms on the discipline to be observed in cemeteries in order to protect and foster their sacred character. The following norms satisfy that requirement.

II. Article II: Composition

- A. These guidelines are intended to set forth minimum standards for the operation of all Catholic cemeteries directly owned by the Diocese of Austin or through its parishes. Other cemeteries, called Catholic cemeteries, but owned by other entities, are encouraged to follow these guidelines.
- B. Diocesan-owned and parish-owned cemeteries fall under the direct authority of the Bishop of Austin. All monies, real properties, investments, and assets of any kind whatsoever are owned by the Bishop of Austin and his successors in office.
- C. In virtue of their appointment by the diocesan Bishop, pastors are responsible for the operation of Catholic cemeteries located within the territorial limits of their parish.
- D. The pastor is to monitor the day-to-day activities of all Catholic cemeteries within the parish's jurisdiction, including any renovation and major purchases. He will gather and maintain data relating to persons buried, plot locations, and other pertinent information.
 - 1. The pastor is directly responsible to the diocesan Bishop for maintaining the sacred character of the cemetery space.
- E. It is the responsibility of the dean to inspect all records pertaining to the cemetery and the cemetery itself during his visitation to determine whether these guidelines are being followed.
 - 1. He will include this in his report to the diocesan Bishop.
- F. All Catholic cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Austin will have a board of directors consisting of a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and at least two other members.
 - 1. The pastor of the parish will act as president and he shall appoint the other members for staggered terms.
 - 2. The function of the board of directors is to assist the pastor in the operation of the cemetery.
 - 3. The board of directors shall also assist in the planning and development of the cemetery and shall keep the records of inventories and transactions.

- G. Since the establishing of a new cemetery involves a serious obligation of the diocese, no cemetery can be erected without the written permission of the Bishop.

III. Article III: Financial

- A. Because they are sacred spaces, cemeteries will be maintained as perpetual-care facilities through administration by a board of directors acting as a planning commission.
- B. Monies obtained from the sale of plots and from other sources will provide a perpetual-care fund in order that all cemeteries become self-sufficient.
- C. Perpetual-care funds are to be deposited in a special cemetery account apart from parish funds.
 - 1. These funds must be deposited only in:
 - a. A federally insured banking institution (not to exceed \$100,000 in any one institution)
 - b. Other account as the Bishop may approve
- D. Investment of perpetual-care cemetery funds will be done by the pastor of the parish in consultation with the board of directors.
- E. Extraordinary expenditures will be made only after approval by the diocese.
- F. Financial records of all cemetery funds shall be kept in the parish.
- G. No cemetery fund has the authority to enter into any loan agreement and no assets can be pledged as collateral for any loans to individuals, to the parish, or to the cemetery.

IV. Article IV: Physical

- A. Responsibility for cemetery maintenance will fall under the jurisdiction of the local board of directors.
- B. The erection of headstones, monuments, markers, curbing, fences, bases, etc. will be at the discretion of the local board of directors and under their guidelines.
 - 1. All such discretion must be in keeping with the sacredness of the consecrated area.
 - 2. All statues, replicas, or pictures should be of a religious nature and no secular representations are permitted.

- C. Records of burials are to be kept in a ledger listing the full name of the deceased, date of birth, date of death, and attending funeral home.
 - 1. The record should also show the location of the burial within the cemetery by section, plat number, row, and grave number.
 - a. Records should indicate the location of the inurnment of cremated remains in a mausoleum or columbarium by row, space, or niche number.
 - 2. The recorded information should be transcribed to a card file or document file.
 - a. This file should contain any other pertinent information such as the financial status of the grave, whether it is a double plot or multiple burial site, and for whom else it is registered.
 - b. Any historical data regarding the burial should be recorded (e.g., “Veteran, 1st Infantry, U.S. Army, killed in action, 2nd World War”).
- D. Cemetery burial records and maps will be kept current along with other parish records.
 - 1. These records will be reviewed by the dean during his visits.