

## FLORIDA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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### STATEMENT AND POLICY ON CREMATION IN THE PROVINCE OF MIAMI *Approved by the Bishops, December 4, 2006*

"BUT AS FOR ME, I KNOW THAT MY VINDICATOR LIVES,  
AND FROM MY FLESH I SHALL SEE GOD;  
MY INMOST BEING IS CONSUMED WITH LONGING."

- Job 19:25,26

#### *I. Statement*

As Christians, we profess faith in the incarnation of the Word made flesh and His bodily resurrection which we will share on the Last Day. While Jesus walked this earth, he had a human body. With his hands he cured the sick and the crippled. With his feet he walked to visit friends and meet strangers to whom he preached the news of salvation. On Mt. Tabor, his human body was transfigured. On the Cross, his body endured intense suffering for our redemption. His body risen from the empty tomb is our hope of resurrection. We are reminded of the words of Saint Paul who wrote to the Corinthians: "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is within the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body". (I Cor. 6:19-20)

During the life-time of a Christian on earth, the body, which was created by God and raised in baptism to a special dignity, serves as a temple of the Holy Spirit. In our modern times, when life is valued by some as cheap, abortions are legal, and euthanasia considered charity, there is no wonder that those without faith, oftentimes, quickly and even carelessly dispose of the body.

In Masses for the Dead, the Church celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ's Passover for the departed and offers prayers and petitions for them. In communion with all Christ's members, these prayers bring both spiritual strength and a consoling hope. The viewing of the body of a beloved deceased does not constitute a display of something repugnant, but rather offers an advantageous opportunity beneficial to the mental well-being of the survivors by facing the reality of the moment upon their minds and emotions. Modern grief-counseling therapists indicate that this experience is helpful in an acceptance of death by the bereaved left behind.

From the first century, Christians have followed the Semitic custom of burying the dead, both in contrast to the Roman practice of cremation and in opposition to the contempt shown Christians by their persecutors in their occasional cremating of the bodies of martyrs and scattering their ashes. Down through the centuries the practice of rites of burial prevailed. Today, in the United States, the traditional "Rite of Funerals" includes the vigil for the deceased usually at a funeral home, a Mass of Christian Burial in the parish church and the final commendation at the grave or tomb.

It is the expressed tradition of the Catholic Church that the practice of Christian burial of the faithful be maintained. The *Code of Canon Law* states in canon 1176, § 3, that "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching."

In 1997, the Holy See granted an indult to the *Order of Christian Funerals* permitting the Latin bishop in the United States of America to decide whether to allow a person's cremated remains at Funeral Masses in their dioceses. The permission is to be granted on a case-by-case basis. It is also clear in the indult that when cremation is chosen, "it is greatly to be preferred that the funeral liturgy take place in the presence of the body of the deceased prior to its cremation." But when cremation has already occurred, a bishop can grant permission for a properly sequenced ritual: vigil, then funeral Mass, then committal rite.

Thus, while "cremation is now permitted, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in its rites." (*Order of Christian Funerals*, 413) However, "when extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of a body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by all who minister to the family of the deceased." (*OCF*, 415)

Any catechesis on the subject of cremation should emphasize that "the cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of a human body. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition." (*OCF*, 417)

The rites for burial of the cremated remains of a body may be found in the appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. This appendix recommends that when cremation is chosen, the body be cremated after the Funeral, thus allowing for the presence of the body at the Funeral Mass. When pastoral circumstances require it, however, cremation and committal may take place even before the Funeral liturgy.

## *II. Guidelines*

### *A. The Decision for Cremation*

1. Catholics may choose cremation, provided it in no way expresses a denial of the Catholic teaching of the dignity of the body, created by Almighty God to be a temple of the Holy Spirit and destined to share fully in the resurrection of the just on the Last Day.
2. Although the Church understands that certain circumstances and preferences may exist for individuals or relatives to seek cremation, she maintains as a first preference the funeral rites with the body present and its immediate burial in a cemetery.
3. The clergy are encouraged to use suitable occasions to teach on the dignity of the human body even after death; including preaching on this subject when appropriate.
4. The Catholic faithful are encouraged to seek the counsel of their pastor before choosing cremation.
5. With particular solicitude, pastors are to be vigilant that the poor, homeless and *vagii* found within the parish are not forced to select cremation due to their financial situation. In such cases and whenever possible, the parish is to provide financial assistance to meet their reasonable funeral expenses.
6. When a doubt arises for the priest or deacon as to the proper motivations of the deceased or of the family for cremation, favor should be given to the request unless contrary indications are clear.

*B. Funeral Rites*

1. Pastors in the Province of Miami can grant permission on an individual basis for cremated remains to be present at a Funeral Mass.
2. The liturgical rites from the *Order of Christian Funerals*, especially as found in Appendix 2 on Cremation, are to be followed.
3. Clergy can go to the crematory building to provide the appropriate liturgical rites. Mass, however, may never be celebrated in the crematory building. Care must be taken to avoid scandal or suggestion of religious indifferentism.

*C. Burial or Entombment*

1. The final disposition of cremated remains should always reflect the Christian belief in the bodily resurrection and the respect afforded to the human body, even after death.
2. The Church recommends that the burial or entombment of the cremated remains occurs without delay, once the cremation process is completed.
3. "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 the Church requires." (OCF, 417) Such methods of disposing of cremated remains are inconsistent with the due respect and honor that the Church wants to preserve for her departed children.
4. Cremated remains are to be placed in an urn (or other suitable container) and either buried in the ground or at sea, or entombed in a columbarium. Each urn is to contain the cremated remains of only one person. The cremated remains of one person are not to be divided but rather are always kept in the same urn.
5. Catholics are strongly encouraged to be buried or entombed in a Catholic cemetery or the Catholic section of a non-Catholic cemetery.
6. A priest or deacon is to accompany the remains to the cemetery and perform the prescribed liturgical rites. If the grave or niche has not been blessed, the priest or deacon is to do so at this time.
7. The practice of a common grave, ground or niche where the cremated remains of several persons are scattered, poured, buried or combined without individual urns is to be completely avoided in Catholic cemeteries. Catholics should not select this practice for the final disposition of their mortal, cremated remains.
8. Except for existing parish cemeteries, burial of a body or cremated remains on parish or mission property in the province of Miami is not allowed without permission from the local bishop.

*D. Burial at Sea*

1. The cremated remains of the body may be properly buried at sea in the urn, coffin or other container in which they have been carried to the place of committal.

2. When a body or the cremated remains of a body are buried at sea, the Committal prayer found at number 406, 4 of the *Order of Christian Funerals* is said.

*E. Parish Columbaria and Memorial Gardens*

1. The establishment of (new) columbaria or memorial gardens in churches or chapels or on parish/mission grounds is not permitted in the Province of Miami
2. Those parish columbaria or memorial gardens already established with the approval of the diocesan bishop may continue to operate but are to be managed according to the directives of the diocesan bishop.