

ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
OF CHARLESTON

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

June 29, 2023

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am writing to address a growing issue. Today, there is a general misunderstanding of the burial and cremation processes and the Church's teachings on them. Many times, when a loved one passes away, there is confusion around what to do or how to proceed. Additionally, there is the question of how and where a burial ought to take place. I have heard so many times, "This is my first experience. I don't know what to do."

Death is a natural part of human existence. Christ, through his crucifixion and resurrection, conquered death and opened the gates of heaven. Because of this, as Catholics, we understand that death is not the end: it is the beginning of new and eternal life.

Just as the Church celebrates life through baptism, it also cherishes the lives of those who have gone before us through the Rite of Christian Burial. This is why it is important as Christians to be buried in the proper manner and place. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection" (#2300).

The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body. However, the Church encourages full-body burials as the preferred method to preserve the dignity of the person and to guard against abuse.

Today, only 33% of Catholics are having full-body burials. Every year that percentage decreases and other, morally unsound processes increase. These include:

1. **Improper interment of ashes:** It is a common practice not to bury cremated ashes. Some individuals keep ashes in their homes, scatter them in multiple areas or turn them into material objects.
2. **Green burials:** Green burials remove the emphasis from the human person and focus on the utility of a "sustainable" and "eco-friendly" burial.
3. **Aqua cremation:** This process involves discarding human remains via flushing a body out with chemicals and water, then returning its by-products to nature.

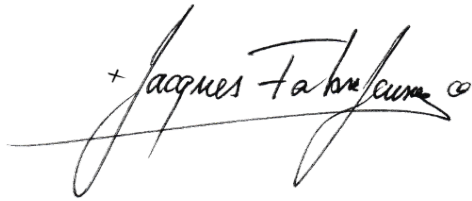
These practices are morally illicit in all cases. Burying the dead is a corporal work of mercy, and the same dignity that is owed to our loved ones in life is owed to them after death. This is why we must bury our loved ones with the hope that one day they will share in Jesus' resurrection.

The Catholic Church has designated the appropriate place of burial: cemeteries that have been consecrated for this purpose. While the Church does permit burial in non-Catholic cemeteries, burial in the blessed ground of a Catholic cemetery is an extension of our baptismal promises. It gives witness, even in death, to faith in the Resurrection. I encourage you to consider this important matter and discuss it with your families.

If you have any questions or concerns, please turn to your priest for advice or reach out to my staff in the Office of Cemeteries.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Jacques Fabre-Jeune" followed by a small circular mark.

Most Rev. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS
Bishop of Charleston