

Principles and Guidelines for the Orderly Implementation of the Cremation

Appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*

The Church's Reverence for the Sacredness of the Human Body

1. The Church's belief in the sacredness of the human body and the resurrection of the dead has traditionally found expression in the care taken to prepare the bodies of the deceased for burial. "The Christian faithful are unequivocally confronted by the mystery of life and death when they are faced with the presence of the body of one who has died."¹ "The body forcefully brings to mind our belief that our human bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead."² In addition, the body which lies in death recalls the personal story of faith, the past relationships, and the continued spiritual presence of the deceased person. "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed"³ after the example of Christ's own will to be buried.⁴

2. The *Order of Christian Funerals* presents the Church's order of rituals for the celebration of the death of one of its faithful members. When the rites of the *Order of Christian Funerals* are fully celebrated they ritualize the journey from life through death to the fullness of God. The *Order of Christian Funerals* makes normative a funeral liturgy celebrated in church in the presence of the body of the deceased "since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites."⁵

3. "The Church's teaching in regard to the human body as well as the Church's preference for burial of the body should be a regular part of catechesis on all levels and pastors should make particular efforts to preserve this important teaching."⁶

Cremation in General

4. Although the Church earnestly recommends the custom of burying the bodies of the dead it does not forbid cremation. Cremation "does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body."⁷ In the case of cremation, the *Order of Christian Funerals* is to be celebrated in the same way as if the body were to be interred or entombed. What is different when cremation takes place is only the final disposition of the body. Cremation takes place following the funeral liturgy.⁸

Immediate (Direct) Cremation

5. Pastoral sensitivity must be exercised in those circumstances when it is not possible for the body to be present for the Funeral Mass and extraordinary circumstances make the immediate cremation of a body the only feasible choice.⁹ In response to such pastoral consideration and numerous requests and concerns made known to them, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on August 6, 1996 requested from the Apostolic See an indult to permit the diocesan bishop to allow the presence of the cremated remains of a body at the Funeral Liturgy in the dioceses of the United States.

The Indult

6. "By virtue of this indult granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship (Prot. N. CD 1589/96/L. March 21, 1997) the celebration of the funeral liturgy, including the Eucharist, in the presence of the cremated remains of the body of a deceased person is permitted in the dioceses of the United States of America under the following conditions:

- That the cremation is not inspired by motives contrary to Christian teaching, according to the *Code of Canon Law* (canon 1176 § 3).
- That each diocesan bishop will judge whether it is pastorally proper to celebrate the liturgy for the dead, including the Eucharist, with the ashes present, taking into account

the concrete circumstances in each individual case, and in harmony with the spirit and precise content of the current canonical and liturgical norms."¹⁰

7. In the Archdiocese of Newark, the Archbishop has given delegation to the local pastor to grant permission for the funeral liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains. (This permission will be reviewed after an initial period of six months.) The pastor must consider the reasons for the request and receive the necessary assurance that the cremated remains will be handled with reverence and will be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.¹¹

8. The 1989 edition of the *Order of Christian Funerals* did not make provision for the presence of cremated remains at the Funeral Liturgy. In light of the special pastoral circumstances presented by the presence of the cremated remains at the Funeral Liturgy, texts and ritual adaptations for the celebration of the funeral rites were prepared as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. This appendix was approved by the NCCB and subsequently confirmed by decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Its use is mandatory from All Souls Day, November 2, 1997.

9. When circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral liturgy, it is appropriate that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy (Funeral Mass, Funeral Liturgy outside Mass), and the Rite of Committal. The funeral liturgy is always celebrated in a church.¹²

Final Disposition and Memorialization of the Cremated Remains

10. "The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. 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 their final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. 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 a friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. When ever possible, appropriate means for memorializing the deceased should be utilized, such as a plaque or stone that records the name of the deceased."¹³

11. An appropriate notation should be made in the death register regarding the use of this indult (*Prot. N. CD 1589/96/L. March 21, 1997*).

November 3, 1997

¹*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 411.

²*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 412.

³*Code of Canon Law*, canon 1176.3

⁴See *Ordo Exsequiarum*, 1969, Introduction, no.15.

⁵*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 413.

⁶*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 414.

⁷*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 413.

⁸See *Ordo Exsequiarum*, 1969, Introduction, no. 15.

⁹See *Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 415.

¹⁰See *Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 426.

¹¹See *Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 417.

¹²See *Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 131.

¹³*Order of Christian Funerals*, Appendix: Cremation, no. 417.