



Diocese of Memphis CATHOLIC BURIAL GUIDE

Why Catholic Burial Matters

Catholic burial is more than a tradition—it is an expression of our faith in the resurrection of the body and the promise of eternal life. The Church teaches that our bodies, once temples of the Holy Spirit, are to be treated with dignity and respect, even in death.

Core Principles of Catholic Burial

- *Sacred Ground*: Catholics are encouraged to be buried in a Catholic cemetery or another blessed burial place.
- *Funeral Rites*: The three principal parts are the Vigil (wake), the Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal.
- *Cremation*: When cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area that has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority
- *Prayer for the Dead*: The living have a sacred duty to pray for the souls of the departed.

Catholic Cemeteries in the Diocese of Memphis

Our diocesan cemeteries provide sacred ground where loved ones can rest in the peace of Christ:

Historic Calvary Cemetery, 1663 Elvis Presley Blvd, Memphis, TN

All Saints Cemetery, 7500 East Holmes Road, Memphis TN

Mt. Calvary Cemetery, 1664 Highway 70 East, Jackson, TN

Planning Ahead: Steps for a Catholic Burial

1. Choose Your Cemetery Plot or Niche – Contact one of the diocesan cemeteries to purchase in advance.
2. Specify Your Burial Wishes in Your Estate Plan – Include location, type of burial (casket or cremation), and details about the funeral liturgy.
3. Meet with Your Parish Priest – Discuss your wishes for the Vigil, Funeral Mass, and Committal.
4. Communicate with Your Family – Share your plans so they can carry them out without uncertainty.
5. Include a Catholic Funeral Directive – This ensures your burial follows Church teaching even if loved ones are unfamiliar with Catholic customs.

Catholic Cemeteries Office

901-373-1200

cdom.org/catholic-cemeteries-office/

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why should I be buried in a Catholic cemetery?

Catholic cemeteries are sacred ground, blessed by the Church, where the faithful rest in the peace of Christ. Being buried here expresses our belief in the resurrection and keeps our remains in a place dedicated to prayer.

2. Does the Church allow cremation?

Yes, cremation is permitted as long as it is not chosen for reasons contrary to the Catholic faith. Cremated remains should be placed in a cemetery—buried in the ground or entombed in a niche—and not kept at home or scattered.

3. Can I pre-plan my burial?

Yes. Purchasing a plot or niche ahead of time can be an act of stewardship, relieving your loved ones of difficult decisions and ensuring your wishes are carried out.

4. Can non-Catholic family members be buried in a Catholic cemetery?

Yes. Non-Catholic family members may be buried in Catholic cemeteries, provided this does not cause scandal or disrespect to the faith.

5. What if I already own a plot in a non-Catholic cemetery?

You may still be buried there, and your grave can be blessed by a priest or deacon.

6. What should I include in my will or estate plan regarding burial?

Clearly state your wishes for a Catholic funeral and burial, including the cemetery location, type of burial (casket or cremation), and any specific liturgical requests.



Diocese of Memphis

CATHOLIC FUNERAL GUIDE

The Purpose of a Catholic Funeral

A Catholic funeral is not only a time to honor a loved one's life but, more importantly, to commend their soul to God and proclaim our hope in the resurrection of the dead.

The rites offer comfort to the living, prayer for the departed, and a public witness to our faith.

The Three Principal Rites

The Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers

- Often held the evening before the Funeral Mass at the funeral home or church.
- Includes Scripture readings, prayers, and the Rosary.
- Offers family and friends time to gather, share memories, and pray.

The Funeral Liturgy

- The central liturgy of the Catholic funeral.
- Celebrates the Eucharist, commends the deceased to God, and consoles the faithful with the hope of eternal life.
- Includes readings from Scripture, the homily, and prayers for the soul of the deceased.

The Rite of Committal

- Takes place at the graveside or mausoleum.
- The final act of caring for the body before burial or entombment.
- Includes prayers of farewell and commendation to God's care.

Cremation and the Funeral Rites

The Church prefers burial of the body but permits cremation.

Cremated remains should be buried or entombed in a sacred place, not kept at home or scattered.

When possible, the Church recommends having the body present for the Funeral Mass before cremation.

Planning Your Catholic Funeral

Meet with Your Parish Priest or Funeral Coordinator

- Discuss funeral liturgy preferences, music, and readings.

Select Scripture Readings & Hymns

- The Order of Christian Funerals provides many options that express hope in the Resurrection.

Designate Pallbearers, Readers, and Gift Bearers

- Involve family and friends in meaningful ways.

Communicate Your Wishes

- Include funeral instructions in your will or estate plan.

Choose the Burial Location

- If possible, select a Catholic cemetery or other blessed burial ground.

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cdom.org/catholic-cemeteries-office/

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can a Funeral Mass be held for someone who is cremated?

Yes. The Church allows a Funeral Mass with cremated remains present, though burial of the body before cremation is preferred.

2. Can non-Catholics have a Catholic funeral?

If they desired it and it does not cause scandal, a Catholic funeral may be celebrated for baptized non-Catholics.

3. Can a funeral be celebrated during Lent?

Yes. Funeral liturgies are permitted during Lent, though some festive music is omitted.

4. Can I pre-plan my funeral?

Yes. This is encouraged as an act of stewardship, relieving your family of guesswork and ensuring your wishes align with Church teaching.



CATHOLIC END-TO-LIFE GUIDE

Why End-of-Life Planning Matters

As Catholics, we believe every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. End-of-life decisions should reflect this truth, honoring the dignity of the person and entrusting one's life to God.

Catholic Principles for Medical Decisions

- **Sacredness of Life:** All human life is a gift from God, regardless of age, illness, or disability.
- **Ordinary vs. Extraordinary Means:**
 - **Ordinary (Proportionate) Means:** Treatments that offer reasonable hope of benefit without excessive burden are morally required.
 - **Extraordinary (Disproportionate) Means:** Treatments that are excessively burdensome, risky, or unlikely to help are not morally required.
- **Refusing Overly Burdensome Care:** The Church permits forgoing medical treatments that only prolong the dying process without reasonable benefit.
- **Palliative Care:** Comfort care, including pain relief, is encouraged even if it may indirectly shorten life, provided the intent is not to cause death.
- **No Euthanasia or Assisted Suicide:** These are morally wrong, as they deliberately cause death.

Practical Steps for Catholic End-of-Life Planning

Complete an Advance Directive or Living Will

- Ensure it reflects Catholic teaching.
- Avoid vague language that could allow euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Appoint a Health Care Proxy (Durable Power of Attorney)

- Choose someone who understands and will uphold your Catholic values.

Discuss Your Wishes with Family

- Reduce confusion by sharing your decisions in advance.

Consult Your Parish Priest or Catholic Bioethics Resources

- Seek guidance on specific situations.

Include Spiritual Care in Your Plan

- Request the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, Confession, and Holy Communion near the end of life.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What's the difference between stopping treatment and euthanasia?

Stopping treatment that is overly burdensome allows the person to die naturally; euthanasia directly causes death.

2. Can I refuse a feeding tube?

If it is no longer providing benefit or is excessively burdensome, it may be refused in accordance with Catholic teaching.

3. Must a respirator be used if a person can no longer breathe on his/her own?

If a procedure, including life support, is useless or disproportionately burdensome, or later becomes so, it may be considered morally optional and, therefore, not required.

4. Is it ever ethically justified to "unplug" or disconnect the respirator?

Any life-prolonging procedure, including use of a respirator, may be withdrawn if it does not provide a reasonable hope of benefit, or if it only prolongs the dying process. When life prolonging procedures are withdrawn, the person dies because of the underlying illness. A person is not killed when the inevitable dying process is allowed to take place naturally.

5. Is hospice care acceptable?

Yes. Hospice is encouraged when it focuses on comfort and respect for life, not hastening death.

4. What about Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders?

These can be morally acceptable when CPR would offer no reasonable benefit or would cause serious harm.

5. Is medically assisted suicide acceptable?

We cannot direct a physician to provide a medication, or some other course of action, which is given purposely and directly to end that person's life. This is direct killing, or euthanasia, and is wrong.