



Committee on Doctrine

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MEMORANDUM

TO: ALL BISHOPS

FROM: MOST REVEREND DANIEL E. FLORES
BISHOP OF BROWNSVILLE
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON DOCTRINE

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE STATEMENT “ON THE PROPER DISPOSITION OF BODILY REMAINS”

DATE: 20 MARCH 2023

At its recently concluded meeting, the Administrative Committee authorized the publication of a statement produced by the Committee on Doctrine, “On the Proper Disposition of Bodily Remains,” which provides principles for evaluating the newer methods and technologies for disposition of the bodies of the deceased. These principles are based on the 2016 “Instruction regarding the Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation” (*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Below you will find a summary of the key points.

In the statement, the Committee affirms that every human being has been created in the image of God and has an inherent dignity and worth. Furthermore, since “every man and woman is a unity of body and soul, respect for the person necessarily includes respect for the body.” The Church considers burial to be “the most appropriate way of manifesting reverence and respect for the body of the deceased,” as it “clearly expresses our faith and hope in the resurrection of the body.” The Church permits cremation unless it is chosen for reasons contrary to the faith, but the preferred method is burial.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Instruction provides the essential requirements for disposition of ashes in order to show proper respect, the first of which is that they “be laid to rest in a sacred place.” Moreover, they may not be kept permanently at home, divided among family members, scattered, or encased in jewelry or other mementos.

An important part of the respect that we owe to the dead is “to preserve their memory in the Church and to pray for them.” Thus, reserving the ashes in a sacred place is crucial because it helps to prevent the deceased from being deprived of “the prayers and remembrance of their families and of the Christian community as a whole.”

The two most prominent newer methods for disposition of bodily remains that are proposed as alternatives to burial and cremation, alkaline hydrolysis and human composting, fail to satisfy these requirements for proper respect for the bodies of the dead. After the alkaline hydrolysis process, there are some bone remnants that could be pulverized and placed in an urn, but there are also about 100 gallons of liquid into which the greater part of the body has been dissolved; this liquid is treated as wastewater and poured down the drain into sewer system. At the end of the

human composting process, the body has completely decomposed with the accompanying plant matter to yield a single mass of compost; there is nothing distinguishably left of the body to be placed in a casket or an urn and laid to rest in a sacred place.

The Committee ends the statement by recalling that our faith teaches us that our ultimate destiny includes our bodiliness. “We are therefore obliged to respect our bodily existence throughout our lives and to respect the bodies of the deceased when their earthly lives have come to an end. The way that we treat the bodies of our beloved dead must always bear witness to our faith in and our hope for what God has promised us.”