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DIRECTIVE ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE FUNERAL MASS IN THE PRESENCE OF CREMATED REMAINS

October 31, 2007

To: The clergy and pastoral team members in the Diocese of London

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The practice of cremation has come to be employed with ever increasing frequency in Canadian society. The Catholic Church has sanctioned this mode for the disposition of mortal remains since 1963. In permitting Catholics to choose cremation, the Church has stated that they are free to do so for any reason, unless it is for reasons that are contrary to Christian teaching (see *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1176, '3). Such a reason would include a denial of the resurrection of the dead, which is quite obviously, elemental to our faith.

The Catholic acceptance of cremation has found its way into the *Order of Christian Funerals*, published in 1990 (see Appendix IV, pages 431-433). Three options are foreseen in the ritual:

- \$ When cremation takes place after the funeral liturgy;
- \$ When cremation takes place before the funeral liturgy; and a
- \$ Funeral liturgy including the Eucharist, with the cremated remains present.

In the latter case, the indult from the Holy See allowing this option requires that the Ordinary judge whether it is pastorally proper to do so, taking into account the concrete circumstances of each case. In other words, the permission of the Bishop is to be sought *in every case* where this option is chosen. *In an effort to simplify our diocesan protocol in the regard, I direct that pastors and other priests simply contact the Episcopal Vicar in the deanery to obtain the necessary permission. If he is unavailable, they are free to ask the Vicars General for the required authorization.*

Further, in regard to the celebration of funeral rites in the presence of cremated remains, the ritual directs that holy water and incense are not to be used in the final commendation (see page 433). Upon further consultation with the National Liturgy Office in Ottawa, I have been advised that this rubric has been changed. *Signs of reverence toward the body, such as sprinkling with holy water and the use of incense, may indeed be used in this form of the rite.*

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Finally, the Church asks that, in keeping with a spirit of reverence, the cremated remains be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium, that is, a place especially designated and reserved for the interment of the dead. *Scattering cremated remains on the sea, in the air, on the ground, or keeping them in the homes of relatives is to be strongly discouraged. Where such methods for the disposal of the cremated remains are chosen, the Church does not offer a prayer service, and I would ardently discourage priests and other ministers from participating in such rituals or sanctioning such practices.*

The death of a loved one is a sacred time which often opens a person to the presence of God in their life. May God bless you in your ministry to the dying and to those who are mourning the death of a loved one. With the help of the Holy Spirit, may you strengthen them in their faith and in the consoling love of our God.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B
Bishop of London
