



MEMORANDUM

TO: All Pastors/Administrators
FROM: Office of Divine Worship
DATE: Wednesday, December 20, 2023
RE: Reservation of Partial Cremated Remains

On December 9, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith provided further clarification on the proper preservation of cremated remains.¹ This *Note* supplements the Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* promulgated on August 15, 2016, by the (then) Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.² The *Note* was sent in response to the following two questions:

1. Can a “defined and permanent sacred place for the commingled accumulation and preservation of the ashes of the baptized” be prepared as happens in ossuaries?
2. “Can a family be allowed to keep a portion of their family member’s ashes in a place that is significant for the history of the deceased?”

The *Note* begins by reaffirming that “ashes must be kept in a sacred place, such as a cemetery, or in an area dedicated to this purpose, provided that it has been so designated by the ecclesiastical authority.” (*Note* 1) It goes on to say that the ashes retain a historical connection to the person and their personal history. This is why respect is still shown to the ashes.³ As such they are conserved “in a sacred place suitable for prayer, sometimes located near the churches visited by the family and neighbors of the deceased” so as to foster an “attitude of sacred respect toward the ashes of the deceased.” (*Note* 3)

And so the Dicastery affirms in response to the first question that a “defined and permanent sacred place can be set aside for the commingled accumulation and preservation of the ashes of deceased baptized persons, indicating the identity of each person so as not to lose the memory of their names.” (*Note* 4A)

The Dicastery also affirms in response to the second question that “the ecclesiastical authority, in compliance with current civil norms, may consider and evaluate a request by a family to preserve in an appropriate way a minimal part of the ashes of their relative in a place of significance for the history of the deceased person, provided that every type of pantheistic, naturalistic, or nihilistic misunderstanding is ruled out and also provided that the ashes of the deceased are kept in a sacred place.” (*Note* 4B)

¹ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dcf_doc_20231209_risposta-card-zuppi-ceneri_en.html. Hereafter *Note*.

² https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html. Hereafter *Instruction*.

³ Cf. *Note* 3.

Previously in the *Instruction* cremated remains could not be divided.⁴ And so now the *Note* permits that cremated remains may be partially divided. This response though does not permit a portion of ashes to be reserved in a non-sacred space,⁵ only that the ashes of a person may be divided in multiple sacred locations, assuming that the location besides the primary place of burial has *significance for the deceased person's history* (and not sole for those living). In practice this means that a small portion of remains could be reserved in another sacred location like a shrine or church that was important for the person's life.

The norms forbidding the scattering of ashes and the preservation of ashes "in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects" still remain in force.⁶ Should a cemetery desire to create a common location for the comingling of ashes, or a family desire for a small portion of ashes to be preserved in a place other than the primary place of interment, the pastor (or equivalent) should contact the Office of the Bishop requesting permission.

In Christ,
Rev. Timothy M. Eck, II
Director

⁴ Cf. *Instruction* 6.

⁵ *Instruction* 6 already provides "in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, ... the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference, ... concede permission for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence."

⁶ Cf. *Instruction* 7.