



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests, Pastoral Administrators, Deacons, and Directors of Catholic Cemeteries

From: The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester + *Salvatore R. Matano*

Date: April 26, 2022

Re: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Letter on the Disposition of Last Remains

Through the kindness of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, the (arch)dioceses in the United States received a copy of a letter (see attached) from Cardinal Luis Ladaria, S.J., Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, concerning techniques for the disposition of last remains that are touted as more ecological alternatives to cremation. Cardinal Ladaria warns that "this practice implies an approach that, in fact, tends to eliminate any trace of a sense of the sacred and of effective pity for the mortal remains of the deceased."

In this letter, His Eminence asks the USCCB "to explain to the faithful the incompatibility of these practices with the teaching of the Catholic Church...." The USCCB's Committee on Doctrine discussed this matter at its last meeting and has agreed to begin work on a statement based on the guidance provided by Cardinal Ladaria in his letter and by the Congregation's 2016 Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, which is included as [ADDENDUM 8](#) in the *Diocese of Rochester's Policies for the Administration of the Sacraments*.

Please share this information with those who assist you in the planning and coordination of funerals, end of life decision-making and Catholic cemeteries. More information will be provided as it is received.

Excellency,

in accordance with civil laws, new techniques for treating the bodies of the deceased as alternative practices to cremation, presented as preferable because they are more ecological, are spreading more and more often in Western countries.

These techniques aim to dispose of the bodies of the deceased in a way that is presumed to be rapid and hygienically safe, as well as respectful of the environment, since the residues of the treatment would be released into nature, with the intent of fertilizing the soil. However, this practice implies an approach which, in fact, tends to eliminate any trace of a sense of the sacred and of effective pity for the mortal remains of the deceased.

In this sense, I would like to point out the following:

1. The Church insistently recommends the burial of the bodies of the dead, as noted in n. 3 of the instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, published on 25 October 2016.
2. Cremation, chosen for reasons not contrary to Christian doctrine, is not forbidden, but the ashes of the dead must "be kept in a sacred place", for the reasons referred to in the aforementioned Instruction (cf. nn. 4 and 5).
3. "To avoid any kind of pantheist, naturalist or nihilist misunderstanding, the dispersion of the ashes in the air, on earth or in water or in any other way is not permitted" (n. 7).
4. In the cases of new techniques for treating corpses, the same criteria mentioned above are to be applied: what remains after the treatment of corpses must be "kept in a sacred place" intended for burial and not simply in a place blessed by the clergy.
5. Furthermore, if, in the implementation of a new technique for treating corpses there was nothing left [of the body], such a practice would not be acceptable from the point of view of Catholic doctrine.

To face the spread of such unacceptable practices, the Pastors of the Church of this Bishops' Conference are called to explain to the faithful the incompatibility of these practices with the teaching of the Catholic Church. At the same time, it is good that they reaffirm this teaching with special reference to the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the soul, the respect due to the bodies of the faithful departed and the communion between the living and the dead, rejecting any materialistic, naturalistic approach, pantheistic and nihilistic that often underlies these techniques of treating corpses.

Finally, I turn to you with kind request to make the contents of this letter public.