***At a meeting of the clergy in the Brainerd Deanery, we found it important to offer some clarification on the practice of Cremation. There is much confusion that surrounds the practice of Cremation, so we are offering these thoughts to help all our parishioners as they make decisions regarding their final disposition, or that of their loved ones. Since the Church’s long-standing tradition has been a bodily burial, it still remains the preferred method of final disposition. When cremation is chosen,*** *the Church does prefer that the body of the deceased be present for the vigil and the funeral mass, since the presence of the body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in these rites. In this scenario, following the funeral liturgy at the parish church, after the cremation is completed, the family would gather as soon as possible for the Rite of Committal at the cemetery.*

**Directive for Treatment of Cremated Remains of the Body for Catholics.**

**In line with a new directive from Rome of how Catholics should handle cremated remains of their loved ones, as priests of Brainerd Deanery we would like to ask all our funeral directors to make it clear as much possible these basic guidelines when families come to prepare the funeral of their loved ones.**

1. We know Cremation of the body quickly reduces the body to about four to ten pounds of bone fragments. The Church requires that these remains of the body be placed in a respectful vessel and treated in the exact same way that a family would treat a body in a casket.
2. Since the human body has an eternal destiny in any form, the Church requires that cremated remains of a body be buried or entombed immediately after the Funeral in the same timely manner as a body.
3. Cremated remains of a loved one are **Not** to be scattered, kept at home or divided into other vessels among family members, just as it is clear that these practices would never be done to a body in a casket. These practices are not in keeping with the Church’s requirement that a body is accorded great honor even after death. Thus, the new directive gives the pastors the right to deny a Catholic funeral if these basic guidelines are not followed.

All of the teachings on the treatment of cremated remains of the body correspond with the Christian’s foundational belief in eternal life—both body and soul—in Jesus Christ among the Communion of Saints. We pray and hope that we can be instruments of mercy as partners of this important ministry to bury the dead with dignity they deserve to the people we love and serve. We encourage all our parishioners to speak with their clergy regarding any questions they may have!

The Priests of the Brainerd Deanery

Dear Parishioners,

I want to take this opportunity to talk about what the Church has to say with regard to the practice of cremation. You will notice in the bulletin this week there is an insert clarifying some new directives that have come from the Vatican and from the Diocese. This is nothing new. It is simply reminding us about things that ought not to be done, or things that should be done with regard to cremation.

I will be giving this same document to our funeral home and the priests of the deanery are uniformly trying to address some of the problems that have come up regarding cremation. We are seeing families making the decision to cremate their loved one, and then delaying burial, or trying not to bury the remains at all.

Many people are unaware that keeping a body (cremains) in their home goes against Catholic teaching. There are in-fact many practices that happen today that are not allowed by the Catholic Church. They are not disallowed because the Church is trying to be restrictive or controlling, but because they do not give due respect to the deceased. Some of these practices also bring into question our belief in the resurrection. Might I also mention burial brings closure, when we don’t bury the dead we lack that closure that it brings.

The only option that the Church recognizes as legitimate is a burial, either in the ground, or in a columbarium, it must be on blessed ground and a designated public location. When a Catholic funeral is celebrated, there should be in place a plan to bury the remains of the loved one. This is what I would expect when working with a family. Burials and funerals should not be delayed for months and months, this artificially disconnects death from the funeral and burial rites which is all part of the grieving process.

We aren’t asking people to do something they don’t want to do, we are just saying, if you are wanting a Catholic funeral, then you must do a Catholic burial as well. If you are Catholic, or your loved one is Catholic they should receive a Catholic funeral and burial.

We the priests are not trying to make people angry, we are just trying to educate about what Catholic practice is, because there has been so much confusion. We know some priests in the past have allowed different practices, but we are now trying to help people do the right thing. If you have questions about what Catholic practice is with regard to burial, please come talk to me.

Thank you and God Bless,

-Fr. Eli