

HERITAGE

A newsletter for friends of The Catholic Cemeteries

A Legacy of Ministry

Director John Cherek to retire after 28 years

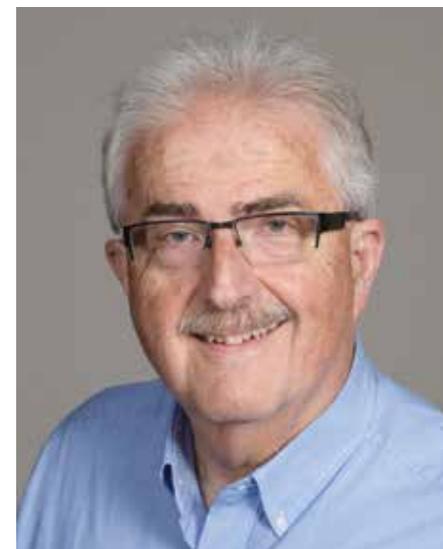
One characteristic of retirement is change — no longer earning an income, having a schedule, and resolving challenges. John Cherek admits that the most acute loss for him will be no longer interacting with the many people he's met during his 28 years as director of The Catholic Cemeteries.

John is grateful “for the commitment and support of the people who work here” along with families, colleagues, vendors, and allied professionals. John thrives on collaborating *with* people, including the people he manages, and intentionally introduces staff members as people who work *with* him, not *for* him. Some of his most rewarding work is the outcome of a meeting in which the discussion of a challenge that has far-reaching consequences leads to a positive result.

A perspective of ministry

While John's position requires attention to managing the business and ministerial aspects of the five cemeteries that form The Catholic Cemeteries, his focus on ministry was shaped through his education, work-related responsibilities, and life experiences. After earning a B.A. in philosophy from St. John's University and an M.A. in theology from Marquette University in 1973, John's first professional position was in parish religious education. He then became a parish business administrator at St. Mary of the Lake Church in White Bear Lake. After one year in that position, the pastor had a question for John: Whether John knew where the parish cemetery was located. When John acknowledged that it was about two miles away, the pastor proclaimed, “Good, because as of tomorrow, you're now also in charge of it.”

In late 1989, when the directorship of The Catholic Cemeteries became available, John applied for the position and was selected in 1990. Three years into that position, John's oldest daughter died at age 19 of a sudden cardiac arrest. Although John had experienced the death of loved ones, the heartbreak of losing his beloved daughter immediately influenced his understanding of the grieving families The Catholic Cemeteries serves. It gave him, John explained, “... a whole new sense of empathy for the people we were serving.” John's own experience reinforced his determination to look at things from a compassionate and pastoral approach that is “part and parcel” of who he is.



Director John Cherek retires on December 31, 2018, after 28 years of leadership.

A legacy of change

From the outset, John has motivated the Cemeteries staff to better understand their mission of serving people; to see themselves and their work in the broader terms of extending compassion and understanding to people at a time that is “very stressful for them.” The staff of 25 is encouraged to “put yourself in their shoes,” and John acknowledges “they all get it; the field, office, and family-service personnel all get it.”

— Continued on page 2

Welcoming a New Director — Joan Gecik

As completely as the position of director fits John Cherek, the position will also benefit from the affinities and experiences of incoming director Joan Gecik. When she was

growing up in Toledo, Ohio, as the oldest of 10 children, Joan's family would visit cemeteries, especially to one of their favorites. After Sunday Mass and breakfast, the family would pack a picnic to spend the day enjoying the parklike surroundings, sitting by the pond and feeding the resident ducks.

cemeteries.” When new funeral rites were introduced about 30 years ago, as a parish minister, Joan was one of the trainers. She brought the new rites to parish life. Joan believes that attending to families who are experiencing death is “...the ministry of accompaniment; the ministry of presence. We work with people when their heart is most tender and the pain is most sharp. To walk with people at that time in their life is a sacred time.”

Connecting people

During Joan's life as a nun, teacher, pastoral minister, liturgist, and church administrator, a substantial amount of her work has been ministering to the bereaved. Following high school, Joan knew she wanted to work in church ministry, which led to her joining the Sisters of Saint Francis of Sylvania, Ohio, for 13 years. Her

order sent her to earn a master's degree in theology and pastoral administration from Marygrove College in Detroit where she also gained practical training to administer a parish. “All of that formation has helped me,” Joan reflected.

Joan has served in nine parishes where she learned from the “good variety of people, cultures, and methods for getting things done.” She “loves to connect things and people;” to collaborate with people, giving them an opportunity to become “part of something bigger than themselves, bigger than any individual can imagine or accomplish on their own.”

The sacredness of every person

As a former math and science teacher, Joan is eager to continue helping people understand that

— Continued on page 2



Joan Gecik becomes director of The Catholic Cemeteries on January 1, 2019.

Joan has “always been drawn to

One of the programs developed during John's tenure is the Archbishop Harry J. Flynn Compassionate Assistance Fund. When a family is not able to afford burial, The Catholic Cemeteries may provide at no cost a gravesite, and depending on the need, the associated interment fee. Also, in collaboration with a funeral home and a number of hospitals, on a quarterly basis, Resurrection Cemetery buries fetal remains and invites family members to attend a service.

John is quick to include his staff when listing other changes that have been instituted during his time. Those changes include new facilities such as the chapel mausoleums and office buildings at Resurrection and Gethsemane Cemeteries, garden mausoleums at Calvary and St. Mary's Cemeteries, a maintenance building at Calvary Cemetery, columbaria and full-body burial sections at all cemeteries, and soon to come, a natural-burial section at Resurrection.

John and his staff also provide a "cemetery ministry" within the Archdiocese that educates and supports the 100+ parish cemeteries in the Archdiocese. John and the staff produced a two-volume handbook that includes cemetery policies and procedures, and for 22 years they have hosted an annual seminar for parishes with cemeteries.

Professional leadership

More than 20 years ago, John became a Certified Catholic Cemetery Executive through the Catholic Cemetery Conference, an international organization. Recognition by his peers is represented by the many leadership positions in which he has served, including president of the Minnesota Association of Cemeteries and of the Twin Cities Cemetery Association, board member of the Catholic Cemetery Conference, president and board member of the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved, and as a board member at the University of Minnesota School of Mortuary Science.

A welcoming environment

John is pleased with the results of inviting people into the cemetery for visitation, reflection, and for events such as the Masses celebrated at all cemeteries on Memorial Day that attract hundreds of people. Throughout the year at different times, Mass is celebrated in the chapel mausoleums, youth groups volunteer in the cemeteries, and historic tours along with other events that promote the cemeteries. Pre-planning seminars are also scheduled in the cemeteries and in parishes.

Changes in society

In view of the increasing rate of cremation, John sees his biggest current challenge as the ability to encourage people to appreciate the value of burial in a Catholic cemetery, amidst a culture that romanticizes the scattering of cremated remains or dividing up cremated remains among family members, or leaving the remains in an urn on the mantel. "The cemetery is a communal place to come and permanently remember someone. We have memorialization — pieces of granite to record the name of the person and the dates of their birth and death. That person will be forever remembered." John reflected that "the whole idea of place has lost value within our society. We are less connected to our community." Despite the many concerns and challenges he has addressed over the years, John has enjoyed and appreciated the many opportunities to be of service in the Church. His ministry has been good for him and for his family.

John smilingly admits that one thing he will not miss is driving to and from work in dark, cold, snowy conditions. When he retires, John and his wife look forward to spending time with their grandchildren, including travel to Europe to visit their son and his family. He also aspires to become proficient in Spanish so he can better engage in volunteer activities. John acknowledges he will sorely miss the people with whom he's interacted and the ministry of The Catholic Cemeteries, saying, "I hope I'm leaving The Catholic Cemeteries in better condition than when I arrived." 🌳

death is part of life. "We are always transitioning; we are always needing to let go. We at The Catholic Cemeteries can help people look at death as something that is normal. We are all part of this creation; we can guide people to get in touch with this natural-living process."

Joan sees an opportunity for The Catholic Cemeteries to continue to be a resource for parishes, addressing how the needs of people have changed as they relate to funeral and burial planning. Joan explained, "Cremations are increasing, but people don't know what to do with the cremated remains. We have lost a sense that the cremated remains are the body — the sacredness of that person who needs to be honored and remembered."

Joan loves to learn, and to help people learn and understand. She is reading two books right now about natural burial, and she was a member of the study group within The Catholic Cemeteries on this topic. Joan also enjoys sharing what she has learned and learning from others through networking, an activity in which she is looking forward to engaging.

Joan's fondness of the natural world embraces gardening and all of the animals who spend time in her backyard, including birds, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, and several wild turkey families. These creatures surely create interest for Joan's indoor cats, companions she's adopted through more than 10 years of volunteer service — some as a member of the board of directors — at Caring for Cats, a no-kill cat shelter in Maplewood, Minnesota.

Excited about possibilities

When John Cherek announced his intention to retire, several people within the Archdiocese encouraged Joan to apply for the position. She wasn't seeking a change from being a parish administrator for the past 14 years, but she is excited about integrating her pastoral expertise with the practical matter of stewardship of the human resources, grounds, and buildings at The Catholic Cemeteries.

Joan observed that the staff has been with The Catholic Cemeteries for a long time. She anticipates learning a lot from them. She tends to be an active listener and wants to understand people's ideas. Joan wants to gain input, knowing that change affects everyone.

With her new position as the director of The Catholic Cemeteries, Joan acknowledged that her whole life has been leading to this opportunity. "I have loved working in pastoral care, funeral ministry, and education around all of this. Everything I have always done has prepared me for this position." 🌳

At Home at Resurrection Cemetery

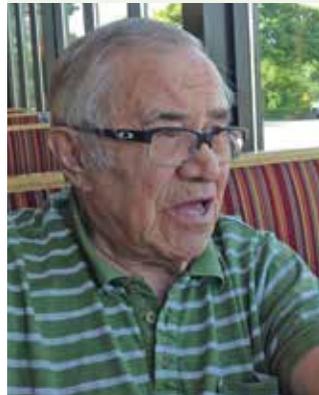
Remembering Antonio "Tony" Pilla, friend of The Catholic Cemeteries.

Marne McLevish, a friend of the late Tony and Bonnie Pilla for 50 years, provided information and quotations for this story.

If you had your hair styled at Antonio's in West St. Paul starting in 1955, you may have been seated next to a governor's wife or other prominent clientele.

Antonio's was popular and in demand, but that was not always the case for founder, Tony Pilla.

Tony's parents emigrated from Italy in the 1930s, settling in St. Paul's "Little Italy" neighborhood on Payne Avenue. Tony's father worked at a paper company, but money was tight for the family of five. Tony always felt responsible for his family although he had two brothers: one older, one younger. He was especially devoted to his mother and wanted to support his family as much as he could. In eighth grade, tired of being bullied and heckled by students and teachers for being stupid, due to his accent, Tony quit school and never returned.



Tony Pilla was dedicated to family during his life and at Resurrection Cemetery.

Life Experiences and Giving Back

Tony's first "enterprise" was a newspaper route, supplemented by occasionally stealing a neighbor's chicken. A few years later, he met the daughter of the



VISIT *your cemetery!*



New niches available at the Resurrection Mausoleum

To add a cremation option to the Resurrection Mausoleum that was built in 1979, 120 niches were installed in September on the inside of the building's south wall. In 2013, similar capacity — that is almost sold out — was added to the north wall.

The niches have a cabinet appearance and are attached to the wall. Granite shutter fronts complete the facing of the niches, resulting in their looking exactly like the other niches in the mausoleum.

Single and companion niches are available for sale. **For more information, call Resurrection Cemetery at 651-454-5072.**



Back-to-nature cremation area is renovated

In section 8A of Resurrection Cemetery, approximately a dozen boulders provide an option for the burial of cremated remains. Cold Spring, a world-class quarrier and granite manufacturer from Cold Spring, Minnesota, cores out one or two holes per boulder. A plastic liner is inserted into each hole that holds the remains. The hole is sealed with a bronze plaque on which the name of the deceased is inscribed.

This year, the landscaping in this area underwent renovation. New trees, ground cover, and tall native grasses were planted. In addition, paths of stepping stones connecting the boulders were installed and fresh mulch was spread throughout the area. **For more information, call Resurrection Cemetery at 651-454-5072.**

Gravesites for sale at St. Anthony Cemetery

To meet demand for gravesites in an historic cemetery such as St. Anthony, our field staff has removed driveway pavement from the area near the office and equipment building, thereby creating a number of new full-size graves. Plans are being developed to add a columbarium at St. Anthony in the future. **For more information, call Gethsemane Cemetery at 763-537-4184.**

Maintenance at Resurrection Cemetery

All roads at Resurrection Cemetery will be crack sealed and asphalt patch work will be laid on roads needing that treatment. In addition, all sections have new numbered signs that will make it easier for visitors to locate graves of their loved ones.

Columbarium installed within past year

In the past year, an octagonal-shaped granite columbarium has been installed on the west side of the Chapel Mausoleum at Resurrection Cemetery. The columbarium can be approached from the sidewalk going around the mausoleum and leading to the new natural-burial section. Nearby landscaping that includes a grove of birch trees graces the area.

Single and companion options are available for sale. Approximately one-third of the columbarium's niches for holding cremated remains are already purchased. **For more information, call Resurrection Cemetery at 651-454-5072.**

family from whom he stole the chickens and paid them back. Mopping floors at Yarusso's, his cousin's restaurant, and advancing to bartending built Tony's catalog of work experience and street smarts. At age 17 or 18, Tony joined the Navy during WWII, stationed in the Pacific where he served on landing craft, delivering supplies and taking off wounded soldiers. He viewed his role as being there to support the infantry, giving them all the credit. "He was the type of guy to give everyone else credit."

When Tony got out of the service, he found out his mother had died six months earlier. This loss reinforced his dedication to believing that "family was number one in his life." Because Tony and a friend needed jobs and also wanted to meet women, they figured the best place to accomplish both was to attend beauty school. Together they started several salons called Anthony's, where Tony met his wife, Bonnie. In 1955, Tony and Bonnie opened Antonio's in the Signal Hills Shopping Center on Robert Street where they met a "lot of people who helped them" get into real estate and banking. "During all this time, when people were helping them, Tony and his wife wanted to give back. They were all about giving back."

A Connection to Resurrection Cemetery

Through Tony's devotion to family and his Catholicism, he continued to want his family to be together. When the Chapel Mausoleum opened in 2002, he bought several crypts, and moved his parents and younger brother, Paul, from Calvary to Resurrection Cemetery. Tony also purchased crypts for his mother-in-law; his older brother, Bill, and his wife; and for

himself and Bonnie. For Tony and Bonnie, family was the most important aspect of life. By having their family buried with them at Resurrection Cemetery, Tony and Bonnie ensured their family would all be together forever.

When Tony was still able to drive, he spent time inside the Chapel Mausoleum every day, "visiting" his wife, who died in 2007, and his deceased family members, but also with guests who visited and staff who worked there. He and Josh, a Resurrection field-staff member, got well acquainted. Because Tony felt as though Resurrection Cemetery would be his last "home," he wanted a garden for families to visit. He remarked on how "very helpful" The Catholic Cemeteries staff was as his "Peaceable Kingdom" garden was developed and installed, saying "they've been such a joy."

During a conversation earlier this year with Sister Fran Donnelly, Director of Life-Transition Ministries, Tony said to her, "I'm going to be dying and you better be prepared because you're going to need to speak. I'd like you to officiate at my funeral. Say something funny." In mid September of this year, Tony got his wish to be buried with his family at Resurrection Cemetery where he felt at home. Sister Fran said it was such an honor for her to join Marne and Tony's family in celebrating this very special person. "I struggled a little in trying to make people laugh, but we all did laugh and shed a tear, as it should be. Tony would have enjoyed it all, especially the fact that Josh and his fellow field staff carried Tony to his final resting place. He will now rest in peace, surrounded by the family he cared about and loved so much." 



Members of Holy Cross Catholic Church in northeast Minneapolis raised money for a tombstone honoring the Polish-immigrant architect who designed the church.

Members raise funds honoring immigrant church architect

When members of Holy Cross Catholic Church on University Avenue in northeast Minneapolis began planning to celebrate the 90th anniversary of their church, they were reminded of the architect who designed the church.

That architect, Victor Cordella (Wiktor Kordella) was born in 1872 in Krakow, Poland, and studied architecture there. After emigrating to the U.S. in 1893, Cordella worked under several noted architects in the Twin Cities. Among his many works is Holy Cross Catholic Church that was consecrated in September 1928.

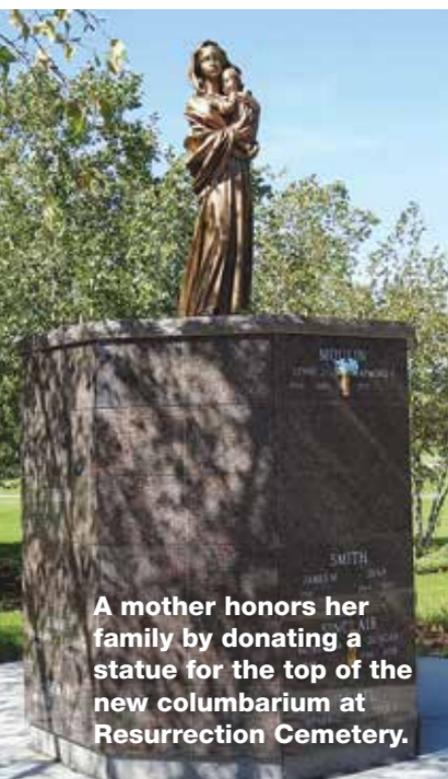
When Cordella died in 1937, he was buried at St. Mary's Cemetery in south Minneapolis. Holy Cross members noticed the grave was sinking and decided to raise funds for a simple tombstone. Associate pastor Father Stanislaw Poszwa contacted Dean Lensing, one of four family-service counselors for The Catholic Cemeteries. Dean worked with members of the church and Polish community to determine the text and design for the stone, and to purchase and install it. The tombstone was blessed on September 2 of this year.

Columbarium statue honors family

When an aging mother's son died, she asked her daughter to contact Resurrection Cemetery to talk about memorializing the lives of her two sons. Family-service counselor, Dean

Lensing, worked with the mother to decide how best to honor her family.

The mother purchased two single niches in the new columbarium for her sons. In addition, she chose to honor her family by donating a statue she had found online. The statue, which is hollow and has a bronze finish, is manufactured in Italy. Dean was able to order the statue through Eickoff Columbaria of Crookston, Minnesota. The statue of the blessed Mother holding an infant Jesus was recently installed on top of the columbarium that is located next to the Resurrection Chapel Mausoleum.



A mother honors her family by donating a statue for the top of the new columbarium at Resurrection Cemetery.



The gathering space in the new natural-burial section at Resurrection Cemetery features a gazebo.

PART TWO

Natural Burial Update

Plans continue to progress on the development of the new natural-burial section at Resurrection Cemetery. Please refer to: <http://www.catholic-cemeteries.org/newsletter.aspx> the Spring/Summer edition of *Heritage* for a detailed overview of the Catholic perspective on natural burial and the Natural Burial FAQ.

A reminder: the term “natural burial” presents a broader spectrum than “green burial” which is more definite and conservation-based. For those existing cemeteries adding a natural-burial section, the term allows the cemetery to determine the limitations, the rules and regulations while at the same time maintaining the integrity that is foundational to the values of green burial.

In other words, a natural-burial section may occasionally use machinery if necessary, but no chemicals would be used when preparing the body of the deceased nor while maintaining the cemetery grounds. But the concepts put forward by such organizations as the Green Burial Council would be adhered to as much as possible.

This summer, the weeds and other unwanted growth have been eradicated. The wet autumn has had a negative impact on the schedule for fall planting, however.

An informational brochure is now available. While not finalized at this time, the cost of natural burial will be very comparable to full-body burial costs.

Depending on the weather, we may still be ready for burial this year. The plan is that the spring of 2019 will be the official launch of the natural-burial section with a dedication on Memorial Day.

The sidewalk and the gathering space have been laid and the gazebo is in place. The granite boulders for memorialization have been ordered. Also ordered is a boulder for the entryway with a quote from Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si*: “In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much is always present. God does not abandon us, God does not leave us alone, for God has united himself definitely to our earth, and God’s love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to God.” 

The Catholic Cemeteries

UPCOMING EVENT

MASSES OF REMEMBRANCE

Saturday, December 1, 2018

Masses of Remembrance will be celebrated at Gethsemane Cemetery and Resurrection Cemetery in the chapel mausoleums. Invitations are being sent out to the newly bereaved. For more information, contact the Gethsemane Cemetery office at 763-537-4184 or the Resurrection Cemetery office at 651-454-5072, or visit our website’s Upcoming Events button.

Visit catholic-cemeteries.org for more information.

HERITAGE

is published by
The Catholic Cemeteries
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CEMETERY HOURS

Every day of the year, cemetery grounds are open from 8 a.m. to dusk (generally 5 p.m. in the winter). All cemetery offices are normally open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and on Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon at Resurrection and Gethsemane.



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St. Paul, MN 55103
651-488-8866

GETHSEMANE CEMETERY
8151 42nd Avenue N
New Hope, MN 55427
763-537-4184

RESURRECTION CEMETERY
2101 Lexington Avenue S
Mendota Heights, MN 55120
651-454-5072

ST. ANTHONY'S CEMETERY
2730 Central Avenue NE
Minneapolis, MN 55418
763-537-4184

ST. MARY'S CEMETERY
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Minneapolis, MN 55407
651-488-8866



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Please join us in supporting the ongoing ministries and beautification of The Catholic Cemeteries. Your tax-deductible contribution can be used to provide for burial of the poor, ministry to bereaved parents and families, and to beautify the cemeteries.

To make a gift:

- Clip and complete this form and mail with your check to:
The Catholic Cemeteries, 2105 Lexington Ave. S., Mendota Heights, MN 55120 —OR—
- Give online by going to catholic-cemeteries.org and click on Donate.

I want to support the ongoing ministries and beautification of The Catholic Cemeteries:

\$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 Other \$ _____

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- John Ireland Memorial Fund (Trees, landscaping and gardens) *Please direct my gift for trees to:*
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- Archbishop Harry J. Flynn Compassionate Assistance Fund
- Children's Memorials and Healing Gardens *Please direct my gift to:* Resurrection Gethsemane
- Resurrection Chapel Mausoleum Peaceable Kingdom Garden Fund

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- Please charge my credit card: Visa Mastercard Discover American Express

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Your Name (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.) please print _____

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If this contribution is given in memory/in honor of an individual, please print his/her name:

In memory In honor _____

In Appreciation

Our thanks go to those listed below for gifts given to the donor funds of The Catholic Cemeteries between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2018.

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