THE CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

HERITAGE

SPRING / SUMMER 2018

A newsletter for friends of The Catholic Cemeteries

Father James Notebaart, standing in a field near Red Wing, MN, that he is restoring by planting native plants.

PHOTO CREDIT: DAVE HRBACEK

A reflection on changes in burial practice

by Father James Notebaart

As I consider recent changes in burial practices, specifically "Natural Burial," I've taken the opportunity to reflect on how the choice of burial has changed over the years. I began by looking at how carefully Abraham chose a grave for his wife, Sarah, in Chapter 23 of Genesis. That was four-thousand years ago.

When Sarah died in Hebron, Abraham had not yet secured a grave, for Sarah died among the Hittites. Abraham began with a simple request: "Sell me from your holdings a piece of property for a burial ground, that I may bury my dead wife." The response is interesting because the Hittites recognized the relationship Abraham had with God and told him that because he was the elect of God, he should have the choicest of burial sites. After some financial bargaining, "Abraham buried Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 23:19). The idea of being able to choose a place of burial was important to the culture of Abraham's day. The burial site was not just anyplace, but one that was connected to Abraham's relationship with God and future generations of his family. It was the end of Abraham's wandering, setting roots in the new land to which God had led him.

Jesus' burial is the second place I looked for information about burials. His burial was two-thousand years ago. In John's Gospel, Chapter 19:38ff, we have a record of Jesus' burial. John identifies the people involved in the burial, how permission was given to remove his body from the cross and how the burial was in full compliance with Jewish customs — which was not common for those executed. John then describes the place as a new tomb in a garden. But what strikes me is that John is the only one to impress upon us the urgency of burial.

The choice of a grave was governed by the immediacy of the situation: "Because of the Jewish Preparation Day, they buried Jesus there, for the tomb was close at hand." I am struck by the words: "… for the tomb was close at hand." None of the other Evangelists add this phrase. Unlike Abraham's choice, Jesus' burial was totally at the generosity of early believers, almost an accident of time: "… for the tomb was close at hand." Would they have chosen another place to bury Jesus…in the place where his family was buried, as it was for Abraham? Obviously we don't know. But there was a sense that the immediacy of the situation necessitated the tomb in the garden.

—Continued on page 2

NATURAL BURIAL FAQ

WHO: **Over the last few years, the staff of The Catholic Cemeteries has been researching and preparing for a natural burial section at Resurrection Cemetery. It is planned to be ready for initial use some time this coming fall. Complete restoration of the land and the prairie will take another few years, but preliminary steps are underway.**

WHERE: **The area is to the west of the Chapel Mausoleum, between the new columbarium in the cremation garden and the wooded ravine which provides a natural barrier and boundary.**

WHAT: **This section will provide individuals and families with another burial option. The natural burial section will look different from the other sections in the cemetery where the lawn is tended and maintained. The natural section will be cared for but not mowed regularly. It will eventually have a variety of wild flowers and grasses along with a walkway and a gathering space for committal services.**

HOW: **This particular burial section will be a natural area for full-body burials. Embalming will not be allowed, and there will be no vaults or non-biodegradable coffins. Wicker, bamboo, or wood caskets will be allowed.**

WHEN: **Fall 2018. Particulars such as cost, etc., are to be determined. To submit your name to receive further information, as it becomes available, log onto: http://www.catholic-cemeteries.org/contactus.aspx**

A reflection on changes in burial practice,

continued from page 1

Unlike the immediacy of Jesus' burial, we have a long tradition of where we choose burial… much like Abraham. I am reminded of my own family graves. Our family is buried in North Saint Paul at the Catholic cemetery. Burials there began with my grandmother. She is buried at the top of the hill among the oak trees, then my uncle who was killed in the Second World War, my grandfather, uncles and aunts. There are four generations of the family buried there. The family jokes about the grandparents' grave because the engraved rosary on the stone has too many beads. Had they lived, I'm sure my grandparents would have brought that to the younger generation's attention. My parents are buried below the hill with a simple foot marker. Their first names and dates, along with our last name and a large cross, are on a gray-granite stone. What is interesting — as with Abraham's grave in Hebron — is that four generations are buried there, even though many of us never lived in North Saint Paul. Our family chose that place, sacred to us, because of our relationship to one another.

Burial choices are changing

Things are changing today. Families are spread across continents and graves are not visited as often as in the past. Some cultures, such as those of the Vietnamese and Hmong, still keep ancestral burial grounds. But there are new practices such as cremation which began in the West about 150 years ago, or alkaline hydrolysis which is a recent funeral practice.

We see a tension in some practices in which the cremated remains are retained for a long time by the family. But the question arises: What happens several generations down the line? Or when families spread the cremated remains in locations that carried an emotional connection to the deceased: What happens two generations later? Do families want to retain a connection to their predecessors? How might this be done? Is it just in the form of stories? I am not sure I can answer that question. But it is clear that we have begun to think differently from say 100 years ago. We are making new choices. How do we meet this new thinking, and what is the place of our Christian traditions? These are challenges for us today.

One of the practices is so new that our terminology hasn't yet caught up. For lack of a better term, it is called Natural Burial. What this has come to mean is that the intent of burial is to return to the earth in the simplest and most direct way possible, on land designated to receive our bodies. There is a sense, too, that, as in Medieval cemeteries, this land is common ground, where all the dead are buried without family distinctions. Like the Medieval practice, names are grouped along the periphery of the burial ground. What is at the base of this thinking? It comes, in part,

> **"…the core of Natural Burial is to acknowledge our innate closeness to the earth as a creature of God's own making. It acknowledges that the earth itself is holy because it is an icon of the One who created it."**
>
> — FATHER JAMES NOTEBAART

from a growing recognition of the sacredness of the earth itself; that being returned to the earth is an honorable and dignified end of life's journey. On Ash Wednesday, one of the texts associated with the ashes is, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." This not only marks our mortality but also a direction for all that is mortal… a return, a passage to the very sources of life on our earth. It was the earth that nourished our physical bodies; that created the environment to experience beauty and spiritual sustenance… to meet God, just as Moses met God on the mountain.

There is an old carving I once saw: "Bury me close to the earth that I may still feel the rain upon my body." While this is markedly romantic, it acknowledges the closeness to our earth. We see it even more clearly in Pope Francis' Encyclical, Laudato Si, in which he says:

The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountain: everything is, as it were a caress of God. This history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning (No. 84). The contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since 'for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice.'…there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night. Paying attention to this manifestation, we learn to see ourselves in relation to all other creatures. (No. 85).

The meaning of Natural Burial

So the core of Natural Burial is to acknowledge our innate closeness to the earth as a creature of God's own making. It acknowledges that the earth itself is holy because it is an icon of the One who created it. Today we have begun to step back to much earlier practices, those of the pre-industrial world in which there was a more organic sense of how all things are related, both the natural resources and the human use of them. This awareness is shaping a new articulation of ecological ethics, of which Pope Francis is a leading proponent. It is grounded in a simple assumption: "If nature has value, then we must respect it." This results in a movement to create new technologies that do not leave a depleting imprint on the planet. We see the results in solar and wind energy, other non-fossil-fuel energy sources, organic foods that don't rely on pesticides or antibiotics and a raised consciousness of global warming. What I am saying is that there is a new articulation of ethics recognizing the fundamental interdependence of all things on the planet.

As we focus on the topic of Natural Burial, we can see that it is part of a larger awareness that is growing, not only from within our Catholic faith but the wider world community. It is part and parcel of a consequence of how we engage with our earth. When we are looking at burial issues, then the question can be asked: How does this relate to our Christian heritage, and how is it different from traditional burial?

First of all, I think we are talking about creating a place — not just any place, but a place — in which we can acknowledge in a new way our origin and our destiny. But it is by faith… we believe we shall rise again. We talk about a new heaven and a new earth begotten from our present earth. Beyond faith is trust. We entrust our bodies to the earth, knowing that God will use them for good.

We aren't trying to preserve our bodies by vaults or special means but rather directly making a commitment to future resurrection... to rise from the earth on the last day. In the funeral rite we say: "Because God has chosen to call our brother/sister from this life to himself, we commit his/her body to the earth, for we are dust and to dust we shall return." Then the prayer says: "The Lord Jesus will change our mortal bodies to be like his in glory... so let us commend our brother/sister to the Lord." There is in this prayer an inexorable bond between our dead and the land. So it is the clarity of this practice that confirms our faith and in the end brings us peace. What can be better?

Back to Abraham's choice and the immediacy of Jesus' burial, we know that each generation places its stamp on faith. Each generation lets rise from within itself an articulation of what it means to return to God. Natural Burial is, in many respects, a return to our origins of faith… to rest in the bosom of Abraham and Sarah in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre.

Staff Profiles

The Catholic Cemeteries welcomes new staff members

Sister Adaire Lassonde, Funeral-service Coordinator

Sister Adaire Lassonde

During the year and a half that Sister Adaire Lassonde has held the new position of funeral-service coordinator, she has provided families with equal amounts of practicality and spirituality.

Sister Adaire, who grew up on the east side of St. Paul, ministers from Resurrection Cemetery to families who want to bury cremated remains. The family is frequently not associated with a funeral home, local parish, or priest. Sometimes years have passed since the death of the deceased, or family relationships or geographic distance have prevented a timely burial.

The practical portion of Sister Adaire's work is to schedule a date and time for the burial at Resurrection Cemetery and confirm that the grave opening prepared by the field staff is suitable for the cremated remains' container. Sister Adaire said these practical conversations about when to arrive, where to park, who carries the cremated remains, whether to have flowers, and other details related to the burial put people at ease and lead to more intimate conversations.

In her spiritual capacity, Sister Adaire's pastoral experience influences her understanding of what people need. She invites families to participate in "memory time" to reminisce about and honor the deceased. She reads passages from the Bible, and, depending on the family's wishes, will recite prayers of committal. She's never in a hurry, adding that, "Everyone likes to talk about the deceased."

Sister Adaire is a School Sister of Notre Dame who taught school to third through eighth graders, served as a pastoral minister, and spent 30 years as the Catholic Charities coordinator of services to the separated and divorced. Sister Adaire acknowledged the burial process "…is a very important time for people who often reconsider their own relationship with the church."

Gregg Miller, Coordinator of Pre-need Services

Gregg Miller

While the Scout motto "Be prepared" is usually associated with young people, that same motto could be beneficial for older adults who choose to learn about "pre-need" funeral services, of which Gregg is the coordinator in a newly created part-time position.

Greg stated that fewer than 20% of people older than age 50 have made plans for their funeral. The grieving family of the deceased often doesn't know who to call or what to do, although significant decisions must be made within 48 hours of the death. Contrast that, Gregg suggested, with the months dedicated to planning a wedding, although many of the dozens of decisions for both events are similar.

Gregg's service as an ordained deacon in Hudson, Wisconsin, provides him with an understanding of families' needs during the emotional times of marriage and burial. A family needs to notify family and friends, fulfill legal requirements, and determine how to pay for the event. Other considerations may include engaging a priest or someone to officiate at the event, selecting a space for people to gather, determining readings and music to create a memorable ceremony, choosing and ordering flowers and refreshments, and more.

When someone dies unexpectedly, or while they are away from home, or when surviving family members live out of town, having important decisions in place is a great relief to the family.

As the coordinator of pre-need services, Gregg's background working with his father in their family business as well as his experience in mass communications and financial services all contribute to his collaborative approach to his position. Gregg works with priests and parish staffs along with funeral homes, hospice centers, elder-care attorneys, veteran's affairs officials, and others to coordinate or present free, educational, no-obligation "final-affairs" seminars. There is no fee for the pre-planning seminar itself — and any pre-need arrangements made become a gift for their families.

Dennis Willing, Hospitality Greeter & Office Associate

Dennis Willing

If you have spent time at Resurrection Cemetery during the past seven years, you may have noticed Dennis Willing taking photos of grave markers and monuments. His familiarity with and appreciation for the cemetery led to his becoming a part-time employee. He is present at funerals as a hospitality greeter to welcome families, answer questions, and respond to any needs. During his time in the office, Dennis does clerical work and responds to inquiries about the location of gravesites.

Dennis began photographing, with his cell phone, the graves of his family. As his interest expanded, he began uploading the photos he took of other families' graves to the website Find A Grave that is now owned by Ancestry.com

While taking the photos provides Dennis with a creative outlet, he noted that the responses from families to his photos are "very gratifying." His photos connect generations of offspring to their heritage, something he is very happy to do. In addition to honoring the deceased, Dennis believes the photos strengthen connections between the deceased and their family.

Dennis appreciates the quiet beauty of Resurrection Cemetery, remarking that the well-maintained grounds and gravesites honor the deceased and their family. He observed that during the summer, the cemetery is especially quiet, peaceful, and beautiful. Dennis noted that most cemeteries are not as carefully maintained as is Resurrection. He feels that the conscientious care of the grounds assures families that "their family member is being cared for." And while admitting that funerals are sad occasions, he really enjoys working at Resurrection Cemetery where the people with whom he works make him feel welcome and at home.

Calvin Jones, Field Worker

Calvin Jones

Hard work and collaboration are terms that Calvin uses to describe his full-time position as a field worker. As a seasonal worker at Calvary Cemetery for three years, Calvin mowed grass and performed maintenance from April-November. Now, in his full-time position at Resurrection Cemetery, Calvin's responsibilities have expanded to landscaping and trimming trees, and setting markers. He's also enthusiastic about learning to operate the backhoe that is used to create the grave opening. A team of two or more field workers also prepare for burials, setting up a tent, placing a cement vault into the prepared hole, operating the device that lowers the casket into the vault, sometimes serving as pallbearers, and cleaning up around the gravesite.

Calvin explained that field workers place a mound of soil that is about 18" deep on top of the grave, returning several weeks later to pound down the mound, cover it with black soil, and plant grass seed that they then maintain.

For winter burials, a burner, fueled by a propane tank, is placed on the site and allowed to burn overnight to soften the earth.

Following a burial, the grave marker needs to be installed or "set." Existing markers also occasionally need to be reset when they are no longer level with the surrounding grass. Older markers can be disturbed through digging related to new nearby graves or the effects of the earth freezing and thawing. Calvin described in detail the exacting process of properly preparing the earth to be level and firm enough to support the marker. Field workers carefully cut away the sod, use tools and a level to prepare the soil, and add a base surface of small pebbles before putting the marker in place.

Calvin acknowledged that now that he knows the "ins and outs" of how a cemetery functions, he has become "more appreciative." He went on to say that when his uncle recently passed away, Calvin felt "proud and blessed" to be "part of the process."

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TheCatholicCemeteries

Special tapestry given to St. Paul parish

The Poor Clare Sisters moved from their monastery in Bloomington to Assisi Heights in Rochester where they now live under the same roof as the Franciscan Sisters. Both of these communities share common founders in Saints Francis and Clare. The Rochester Franciscans are an "active" community of women religious which means that they are involved in ministries that take them out into the broader community to serve. The Poor Clares are a contemplative community of cloistered sisters, which means their lives are one of solitude and prayer.

This tapestry, woven in South Africa, was recently given by the Poor Clare Sisters to St. Peter Claver parish in St. Paul where it will hang in a well-traveled stairway.

When the Sisters were preparing to leave their Bloomington monastery, they wanted to give St. Peter Claver parish, in St. Paul, a very special gift. It is a commissioned 5'x10' weaving depicting the Samaritan woman with Jesus at the well, as found in John 4:4-42.

The tapestry was created at the Vukuzenzele Weaving Centre in Burgersfort, South Africa, and graced a wall in the Sisters' monastery chapel.

The Sisters said, "Our weaving arrived in October 2000. We were overwhelmed, ecstatic, happy for the women of the weavers' guild, and happy for us and all of the people of our worshipping community who would spend time with Jesus, the woman at the well, her fellow villagers, and the hungry disciples, etc. The weavers made it large enough to include everyone in the story of Jesus with the people. Knowing the sacredness of this weaving for us, we would be so pleased to pass it on to our brothers and sisters of St. Peter Claver parish in St. Paul."

The staff of The Catholic Cemeteries was privileged to facilitate this generous gift-giving from the Sisters to the parish, and to provide the skill and expertise to hang the very large weaving on a brick wall.

The parish welcomes one and all to stop in some weekend and see this awesome weaving. The church is located on Lexington Avenue and I-94.

The Catholic Cemeteries

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Attend an open house and historical tour at Calvary Cemetery on June 21, 22, or 23, 2018.**
- **Learn more about pre-planning funeral and cemetery options by attending an educational seminar at Gethsemane Cemetery or Resurrection Cemetery on September 27, 28, or 29, 2018.**

Visit catholic-cemeteries.org for more information.

HERITAGE

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The Catholic Cemeteries
2105 Lexington Ave S
Mendota Heights, MN 55120
651-228-9991

info@catholic-cemeteries.org

John Cherek, Director

To receive *Heritage* by email, go to www.catholic-cemeteries.org, fill out the "Contact Us" form and check the "electronic newsletter" option.

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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.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT
www.catholic-cemeteries.org

The Catholic Cemeteries

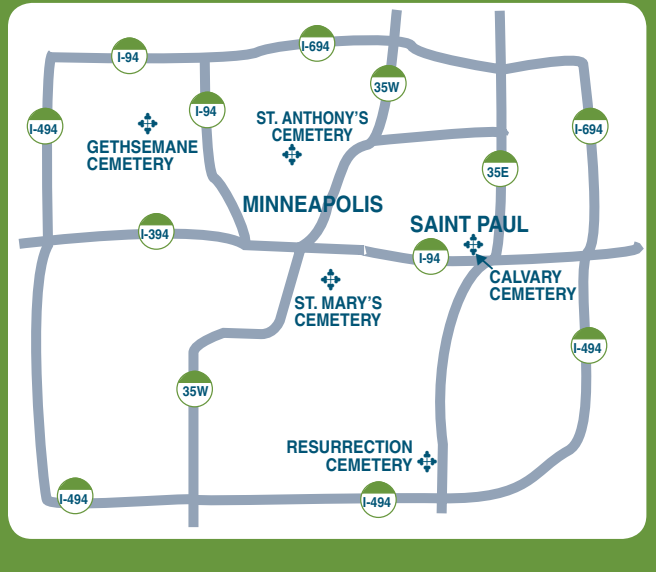
CALVARY CEMETERY
753 Front Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55103
651-488-8866

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
4403 Chicago Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55407
651-488-8866



Mass will be held at 10 a.m. RAIN OR SHINE at **Gethsemane Cemetery, St. Anthony's Cemetery, St. Mary's Cemetery, Calvary Cemetery** and **Resurrection Cemetery**.

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND HOURS
Each cemetery office has extended hours as follows:

Saturday: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Sunday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Monday: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Grave decorations for Memorial Day

During the days before and after Memorial Day, artificial flowers, potted plants, decorations and other ornaments are allowed. These types of decorations can be placed on graves beginning at noon on **Thursday, May 24**, and remain there until **Sunday, June 3**. Decorations should be removed by this date; otherwise, the cemetery staff will begin pickup on **Monday, June 4**. After that time, we request fresh-cut flowers only during the growing season.

Memorial Day flowers available for purchase

Over the Memorial Day weekend, a variety of floral bouquets will be available for purchase at Calvary, Gethsemane, Resurrection and St. Mary's cemeteries, and at St Anthony's on Memorial Day only. Sales booths will be located near the entrances of each cemetery while supplies last.

Flags for veterans during Memorial Day weekend

Traditionally, before Memorial Day, a local Boy Scout troop and a veteran's group place American flags on the gravesites of veterans marked by those gravestones **provided by the Veterans Administration (VA)**, at Resurrection and Gethsemane cemeteries, respectively. For families visiting the graves of veterans not marked with a VA-provided gravestone, flags can be purchased for a minimal charge at the outdoor flower stands in both cemeteries. In addition, a limited supply will be available in the cemetery offices one week prior to Memorial Day.

Commemorating veterans, living and deceased

At each of the Memorial Day Masses, at all the cemeteries, The Catholic Cemeteries will offer a special recognition of and prayer for all veterans. Cards will be available to write the names of living and deceased veterans. The cards will be brought forward at the offertory and all will be remembered in the Mass intentions. Look for the tables and cards in or near the tents that are set up for Mass. There will be someone there to assist you. These cards will also be available in the cemetery offices the week before and during the Memorial Day weekend prior to Mass time on Memorial Day.