THE CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

HERITAGE

A newsletter for friends of The Catholic Cemeteries SPRING/SUMMER 2020

"Life is Changed, Not Ended"

By Joan Gecik, Executive Director

"Life is changed, not ended." We hear these affirming words at funeral liturgies, stating our belief in the resurrection after a death. These past weeks have felt like death; all our lives have been changed. We no longer pray together, visit friends, hold grandchildren, eat out, or be carefree when shopping for essentials. Some of us have lost a loved one but have not been able to hold a funeral service of any kind and in some cemeteries, one cannot even get out of the car to be present at the burial. We have no idea of how long the grieving of what "was normal" will last. And through it all, we want to know the "why" and when it will end.

At our cemeteries, we are experiencing an abnormal normal. Every day we read and listen to the best advice of the day from the CDC, our governor, and other cemeteries across the country. We have agreed that there are two important foci to what we do. The first is to continue to prayerfully and respectfully bury those who have died. The second is to keep both our employees, and those who visit us, safe while they are here.

This has meant that some staff now have to work from home most of the week. Field employees need to be more cautious in how they do their work and deal with the public. Markers and monuments that normally would be installed prior to Memorial Day will not be placed because we have no idea when suppliers will deliver them to us. All the programming that we had planned from the end of March through the end of August has been put on hold. We never know what a new day will bring for us to address.

Because our focus is on keeping everyone safe, I'm issuing my own executive order for Memorial Day, shown below.

Unfortunately, for the Memorial Day Weekend, May 23, 24, 25:

- **All cemetery offices will be closed (Resurrection, Calvary, Gethsemane, St. Anthony's, St. Mary's)**
- **There will be no Memorial Day Masses**
- **Mausoleums and restrooms will not be open**
- **Pre-sale and on-site flower sales will not be available**
- **There will be no staff, including Family Services Counselors, on site**

Our cemetery grounds will be open for individuals to visit or to walk through. We encourage you to spend time at any of them, but with the safety of others in mind. We hope that this pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime event. We pray for all to be safe and to look with gratitude for the new ways life springs forth. Life is changed, but not ended.

Grave location maps will be available for your visit if requested by May 21. Go to "Our Ministries" and click on "Burial Record Request" on our website: www.catholic-cemeteries.org

Moving Into the Future

By Joan Gecik, Executive Director

This past year, the executive team at The Catholic Cemeteries spent several months studying death and cemetery trends as well as looking at how we can be prepared to meet both the present and future needs of our families.

What we learned was that Catholics have more fully accepted cremation as an option for disposition of the body. As a result, we have seen an increase in the need for burial options for cremated remains. We already have plenty of the traditional earth-burial areas in all our cemeteries. However, we will need more columbarium niches and Back to Nature cremation areas at Resurrection.

The new columbarium with ossuary to be installed in Section 7.

Planning for change

We examined the cemetery expansion plan from 25 years ago and found that it never anticipated the changes we are experiencing. So we asked one of our partners at Coldspring (a primary

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Moving into the future, ***continued from page 1***

natural-stone manufacturing facility and bronze foundry) to meet with us regarding our vision and to update our plans.

We are considering the basic concept of the original plan, which was to build out the area from our original mausoleum. What we desire is a place that will be open to both full-body crypts and cremation niches. We also want an area in which we may hold an outside service. And we want that area to have some water features and garden areas – places to sit and reflect. This expansion will need to be done in three phases and most likely will take us into the next 20 years of cemetery development.

A second level of expansion may occur this summer when we add one columbarium in Section 7. This columbarium will have an added feature of an ossuary for cremated remains. The ossuary serves as a place where cremated remains are placed communally in individual velvet bags. Catholic burial of cremated remains directs that the cremated remains cannot be intermingled. The ossuary provides for this separation of remains. It will be less expensive than an individual niche and the names of all individuals will be inscribed on outside panels of the ossuary.

Appealing options

One of the concerns that I have always had is that many people do not know what to do after cremation. As Catholics, we believe that cremated remains are still the body of the deceased and that they deserve respect and burial. Some families do not have the funds to inter (bury) the cremated remains and so hold onto them. We want to help all families have a space to remember their loved ones as well as a place to visit. This special columbarium offers yet another option for those who may not have the necessary funds for an individual burial space.

We are also going to expand our cremation-rock area. During the past year, we have begun to allow cremation rocks to be placed in Section 19A, which is a monument section. The cremation rocks function as a monument, and as previously mentioned, with more cremations, we wanted to offer additional areas for cremated remains. We are also going to look at the birch tree area on the west side of the Chapel Mausoleum for placement of cremation rocks. This area is not only near the Chapel, but also near the natural burial area (Gate of Heaven) and overlooks the Peaceable Kingdom Garden which is being renovated.

We've also been looking for ways to be more environmentally friendly and to bring in more wildlife into the cemetery. One of the projects is adding to the number of bluebird houses at Resurrection Cemetery. Because the wide-open sections at Resurrection are ideal for bluebirds, 12 additional bluebird houses will be added to the cemetery.

We have a lot going on as we strive to serve the needs of the families who come to us with their loved ones. We continue to change with the times, creating beautiful places for prayer, remembering, and reflection.

Partnership values volunteers

When we attend a funeral and burial, we assemble with others to celebrate a life well lived – a life that was important. But what about a life that didn't have the opportunity to grow up – the life of a fetus or a miscarried or stillborn child? That life is important to those who loved it and yet that life is seldom celebrated.

Joan Gecik and Cindy Keller light candles for the fetal burial service.

A collaborative partnership

Since 2006 that circumstance has been changing. That was the year The Catholic Cemeteries formalized their relationships with HealthEast Care System and Fairview Health Services (both now part of M Health Fairview) to receive the remains of pre-term infants. A service that is open to all grieving families takes place in the Chapel Mausoleum at Resurrection Cemetery four times a year, followed by a communal burial in a specially designated area of the cemetery.

When Sister Fran Donnelly, B.V.M., talks about The Catholic Cemeteries fetal burial ministry, she says, "It's definitely the biggest blessing in my position as Director of Life Transition Ministries. It is the most significant thing I do."

Sister Fran said the hospitals are essential in their willingness to connect families with the service, keep records, and coordinate with her and Gill Brothers Funeral Home. Gill Brothers provides small communal containers along with transportation – all at no charge. The fourth-generation, family-owned business has been facilitating burial of fetal remains since the 1940s. Dan McGraw, great-grandson of founder Michael Gill, said, "The burial of fetal remains is important in a very fundamental way…

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From the Executive Director

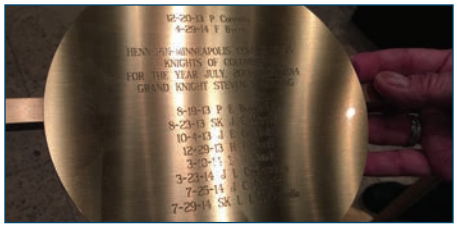
Joan Gecik, Executive Director

Ask and You Shall Receive

In our last newsletter, I invited everyone to join in partnership with us to enhance our cemeteries. We are grateful to an anonymous donor who has gifted us with a statue of St. Joseph that graces the new columbarium on the east side of our Chapel Mausoleum at Resurrection Cemetery. As you may recall, we have a statue of "Mary with Child" on the west side. So, in effect, the Holy Family now surrounds this mausoleum. The statue was installed in April.

We are grateful to the anonymous donor who gifted us with this statue of St. Joseph.

I was pleased to receive a processional cross for Calvary Cemetery from The Knights of Columbus Council Hennepin-Minneapolis #435. The presentation took place at the Council's annual Remembrance Mass in November 2019 at Church of the Holy Name in south Minneapolis. The Knights have been very generous to The Catholic Cemeteries in both their donation of time and of individual gifts to our various cemeteries.



The underside of the cross (right) is inscribed with the names of deceased Council members.

Partnership values volunteers, ***continued from page 2***

Following Catholic teaching, our family believes that there is an essential dignity in how the body should be treated at death, no matter what the age."

Since the quarterly services began in 2006, The Catholic Cemeteries and their partners have conducted 60 services during which 8,966 fetal remains were buried. The average burial per service is approximately 125 remains. Attendance at each service averages between 50 and 75 people, with fluctuations by season.

Valued volunteers

Families are often unsure of what to expect at the service but are quickly put at ease by members of the Community Caring for Life committee from nearby St. Peter's Catholic Church in Mendota. Carol Mulvihill, coordinator of the committee, schedules three people for each of the quarterly services. Since 2014, the volunteers have distributed programs, ushered people to seats, provided flowers for guests to bring to the communal gravesite, and served refreshments when the weather allows following the service.

Carol said committee members embrace the opportunity to be at Resurrection for the service. "They are really touched by it. You feel you've been helpful to someone who is in sorrow. It's important as a community that we care for every life and that we honor those little ones. They were part of a family. It's important for families to be able to grieve for them."

In addition to volunteering at the fetal burial services, the Community Caring for Life meets once a month during the school year. The meeting concludes with a prayer of thanksgiving to God to continue to guide their activities.

Carol said the members of the Community Caring for Life believe "… it's important as a community that we honor those little ones. They were part of a family. Sometimes women are told, 'You'll have another child,' which feels as though the deceased baby is discounted. It is important to grieve; it was a life. It will always be remembered. That life had dignity, too."

Dean Lensing retires this summer

A life of listening

The manner in which Dean Lensing has spent the past 23 and a half years as a Family Services Counselor with The Catholic Cemeteries has some similarities to his youth. Growing up as one of 11 children instilled qualities such as listening, humor, and compassion. And the point could be made that Dean has transplanted his roots from his family's farm in southwestern Minnesota to the rolling acres of Resurrection Cemetery and the tree-studded turf at Calvary Cemetery and St. Mary's Cemetery.

Before responding to a notice for his position, Dean spent time working for Marshall, Minnesota-based Schwan's Company and working in church parishes. He also was a field worker at Resurrection Cemetery while attending college in the Twin Cities.

Listening and guiding

When asked about his work, Dean replied, "Every day, some things are different and some are the same." Often people come to Dean during a time of grief and need. He listens and guides them through making decisions about the type of burial they prefer and the details related to selecting a monument or marker.

Dean listens to what people say as well as to what is left unsaid. He said he tries "…to cover all the options so people can make an informed decision." He wants people to feel right about the decisions they make and that their choices are aligned with what they can afford. Dean also said, "If someone doesn't understand, where I go next is to ask more questions. You get a feel for people. You also need humor. Sometimes people appreciate that."

Many burial options

A clear advantage to pre-planning a burial, Dean noted, is that a family can make decisions when they're not grieving. Then they have time to consider the many available options. Dean explained that a family must decide whether the burial will be for cremated remains or a full body and whether the burial is "above or below ground." Cremated remains can be buried above ground in a niche in the mausoleum or in a columbarium, in an ossuary – referred to in the "Moving into the future" article – or can be buried in the earth. Full-body remains are buried in a casket in a crypt in the mausoleum or buried in the earth.

Since 2019, The Catholic Cemeteries has interred unembalmed bodies in natural containers in the natural-burial section at Resurrection Cemetery.

In addition to the type of burial, a family decides how many spaces to acquire. Frequently the number is two, for a wife and husband, but sometimes space is also acquired for children or other relatives. Once a family decides on the type of burial, Dean asks many questions, including those related to the type of setting someone prefers, budget considerations, and more.

Dean recounted one situation in which the widow was having a difficult time selecting which section of the cemetery was best for her husband's burial. As Dean drove the woman and her adult children through Resurrection Cemetery a second time, a deer appeared and looked right at them. The woman explained that her husband had loved nature and animals and imagined her husband guiding her to that area of the cemetery with the thought, "Dear, right here."

Dean Lensing, Family Services Counselor, waves in anticipation of his retirement.

Memorialization decisions

In addition to the type of burial, decisions are made related to memorialization. A *monument* stands vertically at the head of a grave that is located in a section of a cemetery that is designated for monuments. A *marker* is placed flush with the earth at the foot of a grave.

Among the decisions related to selecting a marker or monument are the size, type, color, and finish of the stone; any descriptive text in addition to a person's name and birth and death dates; and the style of type. The larger size of an upright monument can accommodate graphics as well as text.

Dean recalled a discussion during which an ardent golfer decided the golf-related graphics were "a bit much." The man opted instead for this text, "All my life I was over par, but now I'm six under."

Adornments are available to embellish both above- and below-ground burials. Vases can be attached to a monument, crypt, or mausoleum to hold flowers, memory lights, or candles. And later this year, Dean said The Catholic Cemeteries will begin offering full-color porcelain portraits to memorialize someone. The Catholic cemeteries now believes the technology has caught up to demand for this waterproof, fade-proof memorialization option.

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Bob Zimmer continues "a life of service"

Learning life skills on the job

After spending more than 30 years as a member of the field staff on the grounds of The Catholic Cemeteries, Bob Zimmer is now spending at least part of his time indoors as a Family Services Counselor. He will continue to use his keen listening skills while talking with people about their immediate burial needs or about pre-planning their burial.

At age 17, Bob became a seasonal worker at Calvary Cemetery through the recommendation of his Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentor, Ron, who worked at St. Mary's and Calvary with his own Big Brother, Dick Bierbaum, the foreman at Calvary. Bob was hired full time at Calvary in 1991, then spent five years working at Gethsemane Cemetery before coming to Resurrection in 1998.

Bob said, "Everything I have learned from working, I have learned here, from fixing mechanical problems on equipment to repairing walls to planting vegetation. I never pictured myself in a sales position, but already I'm excited to use some skill sets I rarely use in the field." Bob went on to say that, "Everything I've done is service. I'm just changing the aspect of the ministry I perform."

Bob Zimmer is transitioning from the field staff to becoming a Family Services Counselor.

Adding skills

In the near future, Bob plans to enroll in the two-year Catechetical Institute offered by the Archdiocese since 2008. After his first year of studies, Bob intends to apply for deacon training. These are not requirements for the responsibilities of a Family Services Counselor; rather they're "…something I've toyed with all of my adult life, to do some sort of ministry work. When I was in college, I intended to go into the priesthood, but life changes."

Some of "those changes" included marrying Molly (Thole) ten years ago and becoming the parents of three boys who are now ages 8, 6, and 4. As a family, they represented The Catholic Cemeteries at St. Anthony Cemetery during the Memorial Day weekend, assisting at the Mass (their sons distributed the Mass programs) as well as selling flowers, all of which Bob has been doing for 20 years since former cemeteries Executive Director, John Cherek, invited him.

Ongoing gratitude

"I'm very thankful I was able to find this job that I didn't intend to keep. Everyone who has worked here for more than 10 years says the same thing, and yet we're all still here," Bob said. "It's fascinating how this line of work can draw you in. We see people on their worst day most of the time. Our attitude is important when talking to people in those circumstances. It's fascinating how this work can change a person."

Read more about Bob and his family:
catholic-cemeteries.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Heritage-Fall14.pdf

Ivan Cardoso Sanchez

Ivan Cardoso Sanchez

Ivan Cordoso Sanchez has family connections to The Catholic Cemeteries. His father, Baltazar, joined the staff in a full-time capacity in 2001 and is now the field staff supervisor at St. Mary's Cemetery. Ivan's older brother, Cornelio, is a full-time field staff employee at Calvary.

Now it's Ivan's turn. He started working with his father at St. Mary's in 2016. Last May, his status changed to that of a full-time field-staff employee at Resurrection Cemetery. Ivan said, "It is very interesting work. Not a lot of people like to do the work we do, but I grew up around it. I love the environment."

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Leaf Larson

Leaf Larson

At the suggestion of a former Catholic Cemeteries employee, Leaf Larson became a temporary/seasonal field staff worker at Calvary Cemetery about eight years ago. Last year, Jon Louris, operations manager, asked Leaf about coming back, which he gladly did. Now Leaf is a member of the full-time field staff crew.

In addition to taking care of all the grounds and vegetation, field staff clean the buildings on cemetery grounds, clear snow, and occasionally serve as pall bearers, whereas seasonal field staff work from April to November, doing everything except operating the heavy equipment.

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Gardening leads to connections

If you visited Resurrection Cemetery late last summer and fall, you may have noticed Mary Lou (Lou Lou) Larson-Fine, the gardener. She would have been weeding the new rock garden at the north end of the cemetery in which cremated remains are entombed in large boulders. Lou Lou also worked in the gardens near the pond that is beyond the cemetery entrance and the Chapel Mausoleum.

Lou Lou says what she loves about her work is that when a person visits the cemetery and sees someone working on the grounds, "…to that person, that's an immediate positive feeling." Lou Lou's visibility, along with that of the field staff, leads to answering questions, providing directions, and engaging in heartfelt conversations.

People are grieving

More than 20 years ago, Lou Lou and her husband adopted four babies from Korea. They experienced profound grief when their oldest son died by suicide in 2017. Since then, more than 400 people have told Lou Lou and her husband about a loved one who "died by suicide." Lou Lou explained that her background helps her cope with the loss of her son as well as the losses others have experienced. For five years she worked as a youth minister after graduating from the College of St. Benedict with a degree in social work. For four decades, Lou Lou has worked as a liturgical musician in metro-area parishes, and more recently at the memory-care unit of Carondelet Village in St. Paul. She is also a trained Stephen Minister and Befriender at The Church of St. John Neumann in Eagan.

It's through her ministry activities that Lou Lou met Joan Gecik, Executive Director of The Catholic Cemeteries. When Joan first took Lou Lou on a tour of Resurrection Cemetery, Lou Lou recalls feeling as though "our feet were on fire – we were dancing with joy" about the work Lou Lou could accomplish in the gardens.

Lou Lou described her early weeks as "a continuous learning curve," asking questions initially of Joan, then of Dave Kemp, strategic planning and manager for special projects, and Mike Gray, field manager. Lou Lou said, "There are great people working at the cemetery. They're involved; they're a community."

Reverence and joy

Lou Lou said that initially her work was to help improve the grounds, but as she digs in the earth and pulls the weeds, she notices her exertions "take off stress" and she feels a sense of healing. Because she has worked with many of the priests and sisters who are buried at Resurrection Cemetery through her music ministry, Lou Lou reflected,

Lou Lou Larson-Fine, a liturgical musician, also tends Resurrection's gardens.

"I can pray the day away thinking of all who are buried there."

In conversations with Joan and Resurrection staff, Lou Lou suggested establishing bee and butterfly gardens and inviting volunteers from area churches to get involved with maintaining the cemetery gardens. Joan and Lou Lou believe "there is reverence and joy" to be experienced when people come together in a place like Resurrection.

Lou Lou recalled an encounter with a guest who asked where the sisters from Visitation School were buried. When they arrived at that section of the cemetery, the guest went from gravestone to gravestone with stories about each sister. "They were great, great stories. It's meaningful for people to be able to share those stories, knowing they're in a safe and welcoming place," Lou Lou said. Feel free to say "Hi" to Lou Lou when you see her this summer at Resurrection!

Dean Lensing – A life of listening, ***continued from page 4***

Missing people

While Dean may miss the rollout of the porcelain portraits if they become available before his July 2 retirement date, he said he will most miss the people with whom he has worked – "collaborating with extended staff – management, office staff, and field staff, all functioning as a unit."

Dean said he will especially miss "the many wonderful customers I've worked with." He strongly believes, "God led me here," to work with people in their time of need and to fulfill the mission of The Catholic Cemeteries, which is also the church's mission. "We are faith-based, and that makes a difference in how we approach things."

We invite you to subscribe to our* Heritage *eNewsletter for supplemental timely stories and happenings at The Catholic Cemeteries.

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catholic-cemeteries.org/newsletters

Expanded responsibilities

Dennis Willing

After spending two years as a part-time hospitality greeter and office associate, Dennis Willing became office assistant at Resurrection Cemetery on March 1. Some of his many responsibilities are scheduling interments; leading the hearse, family, and others to the gravesite; and helping families locate graves. As Dennis' last name suggests, he really is "willing" to respond to requests from families, staff, and others.

Dennis became acquainted with Resurrection Cemetery when he spent time taking photos of grave markers and monuments that he uploaded to Find A Grave that is owned by Ancestry.com Dennis said being a volunteer photographer and uploading the photos he takes brings him joy. "I like the possibility of helping someone find their loved one."

Two years ago, in a newsletter article that introduced Dennis, he commented "… that most cemeteries are not as carefully maintained as is Resurrection." Now that he works at Resurrection and is acquainted with the policies and people behind the appearance of the cemetery, Dennis feels even more strongly that the conscientious care of the grounds assures families that "their family member is being cared for."

Dennis Willing

New office manager brings many skills

Cindy Reckinger

"Begin at the beginning" is common advice. Cindy Reckinger is beginning her new position at The Catholic Cemeteries with a continuation of her many skills.

In her position as office manager at Resurrection Cemetery, Cindy will expand on the many responsibilities she held as a parish administrator for eight years at a church that had a cemetery. Some of those activities include maintaining cemetery records, updating titles, scheduling interments, selling gravesites, and managing changes in ownership of graves.

Cindy remarked, "There's a lot of detail in this position. Being organized is important as is listening and communicating." Cindy looks forward to her collaboration with office staff, field staff, and Family Services Counselors, taking in their ideas and implementing some for the good of the whole office-related operation.

Cindy's responsibilities also include recording the sales of lots, scheduling and approving all interments with funeral homes, and ordering grave markers. Cindy also oversees installation orders that the field staff will follow when installing markers and monuments on graves.

A system in place requires Cindy to enter all of the ownership- and date-related information twice – in the cemetery software program and also handwritten on a card that is stored in the paper jacket that pertains to each lot. The obituary for the deceased is also entered in the software program to confirm the accuracy of the date of death, family relationships, and more. That information is helpful for lot owners as well as historians and family genealogists.

Cindy Reckinger brings many skills to the position of office manager at Resurrection.

On familiar ground

If there appears to be strong consistency in Cindy's professional activities, her personal heritage reflects a similar continuity. She has spent her entire life living within the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Cindy was baptized at St. Joseph's in West St. Paul, grew up in St. John Vianney in South St. Paul, was married at Saint Stanislaus Church in St. Paul, and now worships at St. Patrick's in Inver Grove Heights.

Cindy said, "I'm very pleased to be here. I feel very welcome from everyone here. They are great people to work with."

Ivan Cordoso Sanchez, ***continued from page 5***

Of the natural burial area, Ivan said, "Every time is different. Some caskets are baskets, some are wood. We try our best to do what families want. I am always happy to help."

What Ivan really enjoys is digging with the backhoe. "I'm still learning but it's one of my favorite things. The machinery is what I really like," he said. "I also really love interacting with people. It's important to help people say goodbye to a loved one."

Leaf Larson, ***continued from page 5***

Working with his hands is part of Leaf's heritage. He worked with his grandfather and father who owned and operated a construction company.

When asked what Leaf found to be most rewarding about his work, he quickly responded, "I like finishing off the grave after the job is complete. It's important that the family is happy. I got that from my dad and grandpa."

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Bridal Wreath (*Spiraea prunifolia*) blooming in late May at St. Mary's Cemetery.

Grave location maps will be available for your visit if requested by May 21. Go to "Our Ministries" and click on "Burial Record Request" on our website: www.catholic-cemeteries.org

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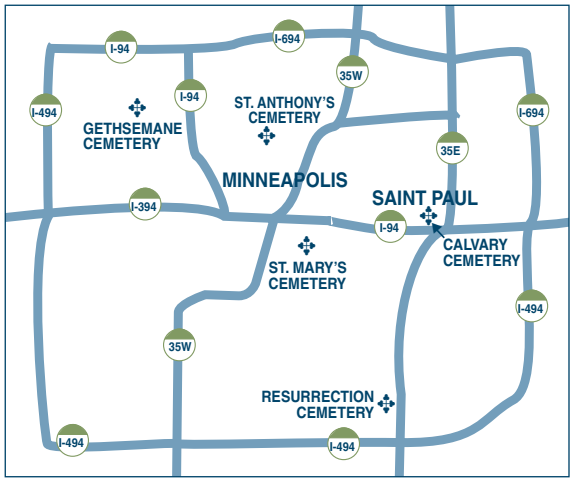
Joan Gecik, Executive Director

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

The Catholic Cemeteries is legally, financially, and operationally independent of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Families and lot owners can rest assured that the burial sites of their loved ones and the property they own in any of The Catholic Cemeteries will always be cared for, for generations to come.



CEMETERY HOURS

Every day of the year, cemetery grounds are open from 8 a.m. to dusk (generally 5 p.m. in the winter). You can reach all cemetery offices by phone or email Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Visit our website: www.catholic-cemeteries.org
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ST. MARY'S CEMETERY
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