

Vatican: Don't Scatter Cremation Ashes and Don't Keep Them At Home

On October 25, 2016 the Vatican clarified the long-standing teachings of the Church in new guidelines recommending that the cremated remains of Catholics be buried in cemeteries, rather than scattered or kept at home.

"Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places," state the guidelines from the Vatican.

The guidelines do not represent a change to the Church's overall policy on burial and cremation, but rather underline "the doctrinal and pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms pertaining to the conservation of ashes in the case of cremation" in light of the increasing popularity of cremation in many countries [around the world].

Cremation has been steadily growing in popularity in the U.S. According to the Cremation Association of North America, an industry group for cremation-related businesses, nearly half of all people who died in 2015 in the U.S. were cremated, up from about a quarter in 2000.

The newly articulated norms [for cremated remains (sometimes referred to as "cremains")] include not storing human cremains in the home and refraining from scattering ashes "in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way"

The option of creation of jewelry and other ash-containing mementos is also explicitly prohibited by the Church's guidelines.

Since its founding, the Roman Catholic Church as an institution has always preferred burial to cremation. [Previous to 1966 and the St. Pope Paul VI document on the subject] for many decades, cremation was outlawed entirely. However, since the Second Vatican Council, the official position of the church has been that cremation, while not preferable, is also not banned.

The new recommendations reiterate that policy, quoting the church's canon law in stating: "The church continues to prefer the practice of burying the bodies of the deceased, because this shows a greater esteem towards the deceased. Nevertheless, cremation is not prohibited, 'unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.' "

Reasons contrary to Christian doctrine, the church says, include "a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church."

"The Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul," the guidelines continue, "nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased [cremated] body to new life."

(SR: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/10/25/499286415/vatican-dont-scatter-cremation-ashes-and-dont-keep-them-at-home>)