

## THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN BURIAL: THEN AND NOW

### *THEN (a history of the church graveyard)*

The traditional church graveyard had, for centuries, served as the ideal place of burial for its congregation members. Members were born into the church and spent their lives involved in the church community. After death, members remained a part of that community by interment (ground burial) within the graveyard.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an alarming trend within our country. The rate at which members were choosing interment in secular cemeteries was growing tremendously. This shift was caused primarily by the lack of space in existing church cemeteries (many of them being landlocked with no room for expansion) and the rising costs of land (if available) adjacent to the church, making growth very difficult and forcing members to go the way of secular burial. Unfortunately, that trend had created some distance within the church community. Loved ones would need to travel to the secular cemetery to pray, meditate, and pay respects to their loved ones who have died.

Although interment within the church graveyard declined, the desire to return to the church burial tradition remained. With the concerns of skyrocketing funeral costs (now being one of the top 3 expenditures in one's life, averaging \$8,000-\$11,000 early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and the lack of available space within the church graveyard, the church struggled for a viable option to satisfy the need for members to remain within its community.

### *NOW (bringing loved ones back home to the church)*

In conjunction with this desire, cremation was becoming widely accepted and is now a growing trend. Members not only were choosing secular burial, but were moving toward cremation as an option to offset these secular costs. This was yet another need of the members that the church had to address. **The idea of a columbarium within a church memorial garden was the answer!**

The concept of the church columbarium is simple in function, yet powerful in both mission and ministry. The columbarium option answers the needs of many of its members: Inurnment within a columbarium allows members to remain within the church community and it is a **fraction** of the cost of secular burial.

We are born into the church, our lives are spent involved in the church community and now, in death, we can be welcomed back. The memorial garden offers departed members a true homecoming on the sacred ground of the church.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CREMATION

*Definition of Cremation: a process used to reduce a body to ashes and small bone fragments. Intense heat converts the body to its basic components, as stated in the Bible as 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'*

Cremation came into practice during the early Stone Age or around 3000 BC, according to modern scholars. Cremation most likely found its origin in Europe and the Near East before spreading into Northern Europe and western Russia. The Bronze Age saw the continuing spread of cremation to encompass the British Isles and what is now Spain and Portugal. This period, from 2500 to 1000 BC, witnessed the creation of cemeteries for cremation in Hungary and Northern Italy as popularity grew.

The Greek culture embraced cremation during the Mycenaean Age. It was soon a part of the Grecian burial custom. By the time of Homer in 800 BC, cremation had become the dominant method of final disposition and was encouraged for reasons of health and expedient burial in times when the death rate was high, such as during war. The people of Rome were quick to follow suit and adopt cremation as the preferred method of final disposition (around 600 BC). Cremation became so prevalent that an official decree was issued in the fifth century, restricting final disposition to cremation within the city. By the time of the Roman Empire, cremated remains were generally stored in ornate urns, often within structures that inspired the term "columbarium".

Although the practice was prevalent among Romans and other Europeans, cremation was rare with the early Christians and the Jewish culture. Many Christians had developed the misconception that cremation was a pagan practice, while Jewish people preferred traditional sepulcher entombment. By 400 AD, Constantine's Christianization of the Roman Empire led to the replacement of cremation with earth burial, except in times of plague and war. During the 1,500 years that followed, earth burial remained Europe's preference.

Modern cremation actually began only a little over a century ago, after years of experimentation in hopes of developing a dependable cremation chamber. Professor Brunetti of Italy perfected his model and displayed it at the 1873 Vienna Exposition. Brunetti's model sparked a simultaneous movement towards cremation on both sides of the Atlantic. In the British Isles, the movement was encouraged by Queen Victoria's surgeon, Sir Henry Thomson, who was concerned with hazardous health conditions. The first crematories in Europe were built in the next few years. At the same time in North America, Dr. Julius LeMoyne built the first crematory in Pennsylvania. Prior to 1800, there were only two recorded instances of cremation in North America.

Early crematory openings gained massive support from the Protestant clergy who desired to reform burial practices, as well as the medical profession which was concerned with health conditions around early cemeteries. Crematories soon sprang up in cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Los Angeles. By 1900 there were 20 crematories in operation. When Dr. Hugo Erichsen founded the Cremation Association of America 13 years later, there were 52 crematories in North America and over 10,000 cremations took place that

year. In 1975, the association changed its name to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) to include members not only in the United States, but Canada as well.

Today, the large majority of religions permit cremation. Greek Orthodox, Conservative and Orthodox Jews tend to oppose it, but those are the only major religious groups that do so. The Catholic Church, once opposed to cremation, now accepts it and indeed cremations of Catholics have increased significantly in the last twenty years. *All mainstream Protestant religions accept cremation.*

By 2010, CANA estimated that 65 percent of Americans will chose cremation over traditional funerals. Both the number of crematories and people who choose cremation over earth burial has continued to grow at astounding rates as a result of the practice's acceptance in religious communities, cost efficiency, environmental benefits, and approval from medical professionals for its potentially less hazardous means of final disposition.

## **COMMON QUESTIONS**

### **What is a Columbarium?**

A Columbarium is a structure that is comprised of a group of compartments (known as “niches”) designed to repose cremation urns. Each niche can accommodate two urns. The Columbarium is retained within a housing structure that is constructed of building materials complementary to the existing architecture of the church, allowing the Columbarium to look as if it is an intended part of the physical plant.

### **What are the benefits of a church Columbarium?**

Creating a Columbarium ministry at All Saints’ allows the church to fulfill the centuries-old obligation of serving parishioners from baptism to death. As the rite of baptism welcomes members into the church community, the rite of Christian burial offers church members and their loved ones a final homecoming and provides comfort to the living; with the knowledge their loved ones are near their spiritual gathering place. A Columbarium revives this churchyard tradition.

- It is a visible sign that the church cares for its members.
- It provides comfort to the family having a memorial to their deceased loved ones at the church.
- It is economical, theologically sound, and environmentally friendly.
- It offers a convenient way to handle pre-need concerns, relieving the surviving family members of difficult decisions.

In addition to meeting these needs, our Columbarium ministry strengthens ties between church and family. Family members are more likely to maintain their connection to the church, as visitations are now made easier. No longer will they have to pack up the family vehicle and

drive to a secular, often distant cemetery, to visit a loved one's final resting place. The family can visit and reflect before or after church services.

This ministry unites All Saints' parishioners, both past and present. Those who have come before us are once again part of the church and the entire community of faith can join in celebrating Easter, Christmas, All Saints' and All Souls' Days, as well as other Sunday and weekly services.

### **Where will the Columbarium at All Saints' be located?**

All Saints' has one Columbarium located in the chapel, and another planned for the outside, on the east side of the church under the beautiful cross.

## **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

### **1. General**

These Columbarium Rules and Regulations have been adopted by the Vestry of All Saints' Episcopal Church for the protection of the interests of both the Columbarium families and All Saints' Episcopal Church (hereafter known as the "Church"). These rules and policies are to be maintained and followed for the general good of preserving the desirability, beauty and usefulness of the respective Columbarium sites at the Church. These rules may be changed by order of the Rector and Vestry as is deemed necessary by those parties. In the event of a Rector vacancy, the Vestry shall have sole authority over these Rules and Regulations. Proceeds collected from the purchase of Columbarium niches and specific contributions to the Church's Columbarium Fund will enable the Church to perform perpetual maintenance on the respective Columbarium sites as well as fund related functions and purposes.

### **2. Applicability**

The holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche agrees to be bound by the rules and regulations set forth herein or as may be amended thereafter, together with any other specific conditions and requirements established by the Church or as may be amended hereafter. These regulations shall be binding on the heirs, successors, administrators, executors and assigns of the holder of any Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche.

### **3. Availability of Rules**

Interested parties may review current Columbarium Rules and Regulations, along with any other specific conditions or requirements adopted in connection with the registration and/or administration of the Columbarium by appointment during regular church office hours. A copy of all current regulations and applicable documentation shall remain on file in the business office of the Church.

### **4. Exceptions/Variations**

Any exceptions/exceptions as to the Columbarium Rules and Regulations must be applied for in writing by the interested party and requires written approval by the Rector and the Vestry. In the

event of a Rector vacancy, the Vestry shall have sole authority over these exceptions and variations. Specific exceptions may only be made for reasonable and cogent reasons, any such exceptions/variations allowed shall not exempt the holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche from all other applicable rules and regulations or other conditions or restrictions that may apply.

5. Applicability to the Laws

In addition to the Columbarium Rules and Regulations set forth herein and any amendments thereto, the holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche agrees to be subject to all applicable laws and regulations of the Church, as well as any properly constituted governmental bodies or other administrative agencies on the local, state or federal level as may have authority in these related matters. If any portion of the Columbarium Rules and Regulations or other agreements, contracts and written documents thereto be determined to be in violation of such laws and regulations, the Church shall be given a reasonable opportunity to make appropriate amendment and modification thereof as may be ordered. Such determination shall not affect any other applicable rules and regulations.

6. Control by the Church

All Columbarium niches or the adjacent sites designated for cremated remains are under the sole control and direction of the Church. All activity related to the Columbarium niches, including, but not limited to: opening and sealing Columbarium niches, installation and/or removal of memorials, inurnments or disinurnments, plantings, facility and landscape care or other Columbarium or Chapel maintenance work are subject to the Columbarium Rules and Regulations.

7. Outside Vendors

The holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche agrees to use such materials, products, spaces, and designs that are pre-approved and designated by the Church. The Church may remove or require removal of any item not approved and subsequently provided or installed, at the expense of the holder of the Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche.

8. Use of Property

Columbarium niches and all other parts of the Columbarium sites are for the sole use and placement of human cremated remains.

9. Inurnment within Niche Space

Cremains must be in approved urns designated by the Church. Inurnment of cremated remains within the Columbarium niches (which are designated or intended for up to two urns) shall preclude the placement of additional cremain inurnments or other memorial items within a Columbarium niche.

10. Identification of Cremains

The Church shall not be responsible or liable for the identification of the cremains of any person at the time of inurnment or at any subsequent time. The Church acts in good faith that the cremains are those of the person of record. Permanent markings or designations of the name of

the deceased and date of death are required on all Columbarium urns delivered to the Church for placement within a Columbarium niche.

11. Inurnment Order Required

A written authorization is required prior to the inurnment of cremated remains. This written authorization must be submitted to and approved by the Church. Access and/or removal of cremains following inurnment must be approved in writing by the Church.

12. Errors

Should cremains be placed in the wrong Columbarium niche, the Church will offer a new location to the holder of the Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche or that holder's authorized representative. The acceptance of the new Columbarium niche space will be the limit of any party's remedy or redress as to the Church. The Church shall be responsible for the costs associated with the disinurnment and reinurnment resulting from its error.

13. Access to Church Grounds

The Church reserves the right to refuse entrance to anyone to Church property for any reasonable basis and to the Columbarium sites in particular in a case where the individuals or the anticipated activity while on the Church property and/or at the Columbarium site may be harmful to the Church or disruptive to the work or mission of the Church. The Church reserves the right to set certain hours that the Columbarium sites on the Church's property may be open or available for visitation or services.

14. Disturbance of Cremains

Heirs of those inurned in a Columbarium niche will not be allowed to access and change the locations of cremains or cause cremains to be removed from the designated Columbarium niche without written approval from the Church and Vestry together with an appropriate Court Order from a Court having proper jurisdiction to determine and direct any such change or removal.

15. Decorations and Other Items Prohibited

There shall be no decorations, flowers or other memorial items placed on or near the Columbarium niche or Columbarium sites. The Church reserves the right to remove and destroy any such decoration, floral arrangement, memorial or other item that the Church deems unsightly or objectionable or has been located in areas where such placement is not allowed.

16. Limitation of Liability

The Church does not assume any responsibility for precautions or protections of the Columbarium niches and the individual urns contained therein for circumstances beyond its control, including, but not limited to: Acts of God, vandalism, theft, accidents, riots, or other matters beyond its control.

17. No Verbal Instructions

The Church shall not be responsible for any instructions or requests made verbally that are not in conformity with the Columbarium rules and regulations and Columbarium documents prescribed and established by the Church.

18. Funeral Service

The Church is not a mortuary or funeral establishment and does not provide funeral services related to the Columbarium niche. The Church does not provide mortuary services or any of the Church's employees, agents, or representatives subject to any requirements relating to funeral directors, embalmers, apprentices, assistants, morticians or any other title which may be construed as or applicable to a regulated position. The Church will work with the family members and/or related parties to provide a burial service for the deceased.

19. Use of Niches

If the holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche wishes to assign the use of their niche or related Columbarium services to a third party, the inurned person's heirs, representatives, assigns, agents, executor or administrator must agree to abide by the rules, regulations and restrictions adopted by the Church applicable thereto.

20. Choice of Columbarium Niche Location

The Church may develop the Columbarium niche or Columbarium areas on a designated construction phase time schedule, and if an individual family wishes to reserve a Columbarium niche in the development process, the Church will accept the appropriate donation to reserve the designated space. Columbarium niches not specifically reserved shall be granted on a "first come" basis. The Church may determine to develop or cease development of Columbarium areas in its sole discretion. If development ceases, the Church shall refund donations received.

21. Columbarium Fund

The Church has established a Columbarium Fund. All money received for the Columbarium Fund will be placed in this fund with the principal and all accrued interest made available to the Church for the purposes of maintenance, relocating, removal, and/or defraying the expenses involved for the development and construction, and continued operations of its Columbarium sites, or some other related purpose if and when that time should ever arise. All excess funds received and not required to operate the Columbarium sites may be transferred to the Endowment Fund.

As the Church operates under a non-profit status and makes no set fee for use of a Columbarium niche, all money received, if any, is accepted as a donation. A suggested donation or range of donations is stated on the agreement between the Church and the holder of a Certificate of Use for a Columbarium niche to assist the church in defraying the expenses involved for the continued operations of its Columbarium and related areas. Any money received for the reservation or use of a cremation niche space or package will be termed a "donation" to the Church.

22. Agents or Representatives

The Church may elect to appoint individuals to serve them in the operations or administration of the Columbarium sites at its sole discretion. The duties and powers of any such representative will be under the development and control of the Church subject to the scope encompassed by these Columbarium Rules and Regulations.

23. Use of Funds

Use of all donated Columbarium funds shall be under the express control of the Church whether the source is from donations, gifts, contributions, memorials, bequests, or any other means.

THE Columbarium Rules and Regulations are adopted by the Vestry of All Saints' Episcopal Church, Tupelo, Mississippi on this, the 21<sup>st</sup> day of March, 2011.



**Chapel Columbarium**  
Photo by Nathan Duncan

For more information about our Columbarium Ministry please call the church office at 662-842-4386 or email us at [welcome@allsaintstupelo.org](mailto:welcome@allsaintstupelo.org)