

## Cremation: Summary of Church directives

In 1997, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments confirmed special texts and ritual directives regarding cremation (Prot. n. 1589/96/L), which were then published as an appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals.

In 2016, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an instruction, “Ad resurgendum cum Christo: Regarding the Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation”

(<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/25/161025c.html>)

To summarize the directives in these documents:

- Cremation is permitted, but not preferred. Cremation may not be chosen for “reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.”
- The Church urges that the body be at least present for the funeral rites and cremated after, if possible.
- If the body is present for the Funeral Vigil and Mass and then cremated after, the Rite of Committal then takes place after cremation (see Appendix, nos. 418-421).
- When cremation takes place before the Funeral Mass, the Appendix provides adapted texts for the Sprinkling with Holy Water (the placing of the pall is omitted), the Dismissal for use at the Funeral Mass (or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass), and the Committal of Cremated Remains. The introduction provides further specific details about how the funeral rites are adapted. In all, the rite notes:

“The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.” (no. 417)

- The 2016 Instruction notes that when cremation is chosen, “the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority.” Further, laying ashes to rest in a sacred place “prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.” (no. 5)
- “The conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted. Only in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, may the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference ... concede permission for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence. Nonetheless, the ashes may not be divided among various family members and due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation.” (no. 6)
- Scattering of ashes or their preservation in mementos, such as jewelry, is never appropriate. (no. 7)

In December, 2023, the Vatican published a note on cremation, in response to a specific question,

([https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_dof\\_doc\\_20231209\\_risposta-card-zuppi-ceneri\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dof_doc_20231209_risposta-card-zuppi-ceneri_en.html)) which underscored the above, but had two important addenda:

1. Families may request “a minimal part of the ashes” be kept in a sacred place of “significance for the history of the deceased person.”
2. A parish or diocese could establish “a defined and permanent sacred place” where the remains of multiple people would be commingled and preserved together.