

FAQs for St. Joseph Church Columbarium

What is a Columbarium?

A columbarium is a group of niches, typically within a wall of brick, stone, granite, marble or other materials, that contains the cremated remains (cremains) of the deceased. The St. Joseph Columbarium will accommodate about 400 cremains, in single and double niches.

Can Catholics be cremated?

Yes. In May 1963, the Vatican's Holy Office (now the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith) lifted the prohibition for Catholics to choose cremation. This permission was incorporated into the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 (**Canon #1176**), as well as into the Order of Christian Funerals. It then became standard practice to celebrate the funeral liturgies with the body, and then take the body to the crematorium. The Bishops of the United States and Holy See have now authorized the celebration of a Catholic funeral liturgy with the cremains when the body is cremated before the funeral. The church then encourages placement of the cremains in a final resting place.

Canon Law on Cremation (**Canon #1176**)

- S1 - Christ's faithful who have died are to be given a Church funeral according to the norms of law.
- S2 - Church funerals are to be celebrated according to the norms of the liturgical books. In these funeral rites the Church prays for the spiritual support of the dead, it honors their bodies, and at the same time it brings to the living the comfort of hope.
- S3 - The Church earnestly recommends that the pious customs of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless it is chosen for reasons that are contrary to Christian teaching.

A common practice is the entombment of the cremated remains in a "columbarium". It is an arrangement of niches, either in a mausoleum, a room or wall into which an urn or other worthy vessel is placed for permanent memorial.

Why have a Columbarium at St. Joseph Church?

Church property has traditionally been the final resting place of the bodies of deceased members of the Christian community. Burial within the church itself or in the adjacent churchyard was once common practice. The amount of land necessary for a burial ground is no longer available to most churches, and a myriad of laws and regulations make it extremely difficult to establish a burial site. In recent years, cremation with interment of the cremains, rather than burial, has become more common. In addition, many people today are turning to cremation as an economical, dignified way to address the rising cost of funerals. In this way, the remains of the deceased can remain at the church that played such an important part in their lives.

What are the benefits of a columbarium over traditional burial?

A niche in a columbarium is modestly priced, aesthetically pleasing, and ecologically sound. The ambiance of the columbarium creates a comfortable meeting place for families and friends to gather in love and remembrance, a consoling link between life and death.

Where is the columbarium to be located?

The columbarium will be located at the east entrance of the church property on Beasley Avenue. The current structure was razed in the summer of 2020. Site preparation is complete and construction is underway.

Who may use the columbarium at Saint Joseph? (Who can be interred there?)

The columbarium is reserved for the use of current and former registered members of Saint Joseph and their immediate families (spouse, children, parents), and members of the Catholic community as stipulated in the Columbarium Rules and Regulations. A niche reservation is confirmed upon receipt of full payment. A reservation will include the full legal name, pertinent dates, and a record of the niche location. Only human remains may be interred at the columbarium.

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How will the columbarium be cared for, and who will administer the activities of the columbarium?

The columbarium will have perpetual care funded by the sale of the niches. The Pastor has formed a Columbarium Board to oversee all elements associated with the columbarium. The Board reports directly to the Pastor.

Who will be on the Columbarium Board?

The Pastor has appointed the members of the Columbarium Board for staggered three-year terms. The Board comprises five members from the Parish and will meet on an as-needed basis to oversee the needs of the columbarium structure. It will operate under prescribed rules, regulations and authority as granted by the Pastor.

How will the structure be paid for?

The structure is being paid for with a single donation made to the parish earmarked for this purpose. No parish operating funds are being used. No parish operating funds will be used to maintain the columbarium or the grounds on which it is erected.

How do I reserve a niche?

Meet with the designated person at Saint Joseph Church, who will help you fill out the necessary agreements and pay the appropriate amount.

How will the niches be marked?

Each niche will provide the person's legal name and dates of birth and death. These will be inscribed in a uniform size on the faceplate covering the niche. The church office will order the inscription prior to interment. Every effort will be made to ensure the inscription is complete at time of interment, but this will depend on the workload of the inscriber.

May I finance a niche?

No. A niche is only reserved when full payment is received.

May I select the location of my niche?

Yes, niches will be offered on a "first come, first served" basis and may be chosen from those available.

What is the difference between "inurnment" and "interment"?

Inurnment is the process by which the cremains are transferred to an urn at the crematory/funeral home/mortuary. Interment is the placement of the urn into the niche.

Will there be niches reserved for immediate interment?

For an unexpected death in which there was not time for pre-planning, it is the intention of the Parish and the Columbarium Board that any unreserved niche will be available for immediate interment upon proper fee payment and completion of required paperwork.

What is the cost of interment in the Saint Joseph Columbarium?

The current cost of a niche is \$2,000 for a single niche and \$3,000 for a double. This price includes the urn (which must be provided to the crematory) and the cost of engraving of the stone Memorial Marker. A funeral home must be contracted for "direct cremation" if interment via inurnment is planned at the columbarium. This includes services of the funeral home staff, removal of the deceased from home or hospital, and cremation of the deceased. The costs for these services are separate from the Columbarium and are negotiated with the funeral home. There are also fees for the death notice and copies of the official death certificate.

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How many niches are there?

There will be single and double niches. Initially, the columbarium will accommodate about 400 cremains.

Will there be a Memorial Wall to remember loved ones interred elsewhere?

Yes. A Memorial Wall is planned as part of the columbarium. There will be a separate fee for each memorial.

May I leave flowers/cards/other items at the niche of my family member?

No. This is to ensure that all visitors to the columbarium will be able to engage in contemplative prayer without distraction. The columbarium will include tasteful landscaping to enhance the serenity and dignity of the site. Floral memorials may be made for the sanctuary altar as an alternative to leaving items at the columbarium. Any items left at the columbarium will be removed.

What is included in the fee?

The fee includes the niche reservation, the urn(s) that will be procured from the Parish Office, opening and closing the niche, inscription of the stone, and perpetual care.

Do I own the niche?

No. The niche is part of the columbarium, which is owned by the parish.

What if I reserve a niche and then decide not to use it?

Contact the Parish Office to rescind the Right of Interment Agreement and get a refund of your reservation.

What if I have made other arrangements elsewhere?

You will decide which final resting place best suits your situation. If you decide to cancel your arrangements with another entity, you will need to coordinate your intentions with that entity. Saint Joseph Catholic Church will only alter arrangements made for its columbarium.

Can I transfer my niche reservation to someone else?

No. If you no longer want to keep your reservation, contact the Parish Office to cancel the Right of Interment Agreement and request a refund of your reservation fee.

If a double niche is reserved but only one is used, can the surviving spouse exchange the double for a single?

No. There are a finite number of single niches and double niches. If a double is reserved but only a single set of cremains is interred, the other half will remain empty. No reservation fee refund will be made.

What is the process to reserve a niche?

The first step is to contact the parish office at 256-534-8459 to make an appointment. A staff member will walk you through the process. A packet will be provided that should answer most, if not all, of your questions. Upon completion of the Right of Interment Agreement and the acceptance of the fee, you will be provided a copy of this information for you to keep in a safe place. It is suggested that your family and the Executor of your estate be provided the information so that they are aware of your plans.

What happens when all the niches are sold? Will there be an expansion to the columbarium?

The columbarium is designed so that it can be expanded very easily. The first phase includes walls that can accommodate about 400 cremains. When that wall is forecast to be full, the plan is to add additional sections as needed.

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How do I make my wishes known?

Talk with your family about your desire to be cremated. You can make those wishes known in the form of a legal document such as your will, living trust, or in documents designed to help plan and prepare your funeral.

How are arrangements for cremation and inurnment made?

Arrangements for cremation are made through a funeral home/mortuary/crematory. Prior to going to the funeral home, a visit to the church should be made to discuss the pending funeral, obtain an urn and confirm the inscription to go on the faceplate of the niche. The funeral home will place the cremains in the urn provided by the church (inurnment) and either deliver the urn to the Church, or return the urn to the family for the funeral celebration of life services. Once you know when the cremains will be available, the interment can be arranged. The parish office will assist in arranging the church services and interment in the columbarium.

Will there be a funeral/committal service?

Yes. Traditional services may continue as usual in the church, and may include the committal service at the Columbarium. The burial service will be as prescribed by the Pastor of Saint Joseph, in consultation with the family, and in accordance with the regulations of the Diocese of Birmingham.

What option does my family have if they want to have a traditional viewing and funeral with the body present and cremation to follow?

Some people feel there is a therapeutic value to the family of celebrating the full funeral liturgy with the body present. Cremation would be at a later date, followed by interment at the Columbarium. Arrangements would be made through a funeral home. Costs would include cremation costs, embalming, facility fees if visitation is there, body preparation and a rental casket for the viewing and funeral.

What funeral rites are celebrated when a person is cremated?

All the usual rites that are celebrated with a body present may also be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains. The United States' Bishops have written new prayers and have printed them as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. During the liturgies, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

What length of time is there between death, cremation, and the funeral Mass?

The answer to this question depends on various factors, just as in the case of funerals. The place of death, the location of the crematory, scheduling the cremation, the schedule at the parish, and other circumstances affect the timing.

What happens at the Funeral Mass with cremated remains?

Significant attention should be given to the primary symbols of the Catholic funeral liturgy, as stated in the Order of Christian Funerals and its commentaries. The paschal candle and sprinkling with holy water are primary symbols of baptism and should be used during the funeral Mass. A pall is used to cover the inurned cremains that is smaller than a pall used on a casket, but is used for the same purpose. During the Mass, the cremains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body. They are to be sealed in a "worthy vessel." They may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the coffin normally would be with the Easter candle nearby.

The body is always laid to rest with solemnity and dignity. The Order of Christian Funerals also provides for the interment of cremated remains (*Order of Christian Funerals, #428*).

Will the faceplate be installed immediately upon interment?

No. There will be a temporary faceplate which will be replaced by a permanent one.

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May my ashes be scattered or placed in a small vial?

No. "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 is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires." (*Order of Christian Funerals, #428*)