

# *Catholic Cemeteries – Caretaker Notes* 1

## **DECORATIONS**

**Catholic cemeteries image the care of the Church for her people, which does not cease when death occurs. Those who have gone before us into the Communion of Saints lie in the consecrated space of the Catholic Cemetery; they are family, friends, fellow parishioners, and co-laborers, all believers in Jesus Christ, Eternal Life and the Kingdom of God. Whether summer or winter, whether in rain, snow or sunshine, those who work the grounds must keep these facilities in a condition that makes them both accessible and welcoming. Catholic cemeteries are to be places of remembrance and hope, prayer and comfort; they must be facilities that reflect the Church’s theology about dignity of each human person, whether that person is alive or in the tomb awaiting the day of final judgment.**

**Comments and suggestions are always welcomed. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this or other matters, feel free to contact the cemetery office.**

**We encourage our visitors to read the printed Rules and Regulations to understand not only what the rules are but often to answer “why” these rules are important and to realize “our commitment and dedication” to you, to your burial lot, and to all our Catholic families and cemetery workers.**

**As cemetery managers, at times, we too don’t like rules but realize their importance for concerns of safety, good order and appearance, and more importantly these rules seek to maintain the sacred nature of our Catholic Cemeteries and *create an appearance of beauty and good order and in allowing the cemetery staff to perform their work efficiently.***

**Many of the rules of the cemetery are constructed to educate the public, the newly bereaved, and to encourage frequent seasonal visitation. Items placed at the burial site should invoke a prayerful mindset similar to a visit to church are not only a reflection of the individual buried there and the family but also make a statement about the cemetery, our faith, and the church. All items should invoke symbols of comfort and hope to everyone. What we see there makes a powerful statement that can heal or hurt therefore all items require regulation and consent before placing at the burial site.**

**Few if any items permitted are considered permanent to the lot. And those items of a more permanent nature such as the monument, floral bouquet holders, stainless steel portraits of the deceased (affixed to the monument) are permitted. These items are also regulated in size, material composition, placement.**

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The rules of our cemeteries are similar and in many cases more generous, less restrictive than the rules found at other cemeteries. For years we have met and discussed this very issue and similar trends with members of cemetery associations in the metropolitan area, statewide, and nationally. We sincerely believe we are doing the most good for people, for our church as well as for our lot owners of today and the next generation.

For many years we have read families personal feelings and positions on this and other related cemetery issues. But today, we want to share with you our experiences on these matters.

We are genuinely pleased – awed – by the expression of love and concern over cemeteries by the people of our diocese. This sentiment is seen in both the lot owners' frequent visitations and decoration placement and it is also seen in our workers' maintenance of these grounds each day.

Opinions have indeed been expressed. The balance ranges from a simple “why not” allow all/any decoration, any item a family deems appropriate to the extreme position of not permitting any items at all. **We strive to balance these requests and create a planting and decoration program to accommodate most requests within reason.** Often religious appropriateness, safety and maintenance costs dictate a final decision. Loss and Bereavement create strong emotions and feelings. From experience we know feelings about these issues can and does change over a period of time. If you are hurting, if you are angry, I can assure that – over time these feelings can and do change.

At times there's a knee jerk reaction for when a visitor is told the word “no”. The impulse may be to seek a means of obtaining control over “my” burial site. We sincerely believe that we approach requests with reason and common sense for a standard that impacts on all lot owner and visitors concerns as well as cemetery safety and maintenance concerns. Where there is disagreement over the rules we asked for acceptance and cooperation in supporting the rules and regulation. It is our goal and mission to serve many, consistent with the spirit of Christianity and community. Sometimes the requests of the individual are not honored when the larger goal of service is impeded or restricted by the request made to us. The cemetery's staff and management are present to assist people with information and ideas consistent with the established rules and regulations. Threats, abuse, and distasteful and disparaging remarks are un-welcomed and not accepted. Any staff member that feels threatened or subject to a hostile environment has both the permission and authority to terminate any transaction, conversation, or interaction with any party at any time to preserve the integrity of their own personal demeanor and the sacred nature of a catholic cemetery facility. Cooler heads must always

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prevail. We regret if these actions are interpreted as unfriendly or lacking in service however we feel at times its necessary.

The cemetery's management is committed that Catholic Cemeteries is well maintained and image the Church's respect for the dignity of each individual human person.

## **Remove and discard without notice or compensation?**

When the cemetery takes action to remove and dispose of items at the gravesite or mausoleum --- it is appropriate and it is following the duties and responsibilities set forth with the care of these sacred burial grounds. Posted notice, the signed rules at the time of purchase, and cemetery literature, our website and our brochures are designed to inform and educate families about the responsibilities and procedures. We do permit many types of plants and decorations under several regulated programs throughout the calendar year. If someone chooses to violate and ignore our instructions, our actions to remove it for compliance are deemed appropriate. Our actions to ask you to remove with posted notices is intended to be compassionate and thoughtful --- not a punitive action. The regulations do state “to remove and discard without notice or compensation”.

## **Why the cemetery has rules?**

All of us in Catholic cemetery ministry are deeply saddened when a bereaved family experiences pain and disappointment rather than comfort and consolation at a cemetery. We can well appreciate all our visitor's feelings and comments regarding the problems with the enforcement of these rules and regulations.

## **Who are the rules for?**

There are three distinct groups that must be considered in the exercise of the Corporal Work of Mercy known as the Burial of the Dead. Those who are buried, entombed, or inurned in our cemeteries are the first group. The *Rules and Regulations* are written for their protection. These individuals are entitled, even after they have died, to respectful burial, to the care and maintenance of their interment spaces, to a holy and beautiful environment of the Catholic cemetery, in recognition of our belief that cemeteries are “resting places” as we await as a community of faith for the final resurrection.

The second group consists of the survivors and visitors to Catholic Cemeteries. Among this group would be those who have purchased spaces for future use, those who have loved ones or friends buried in one or more of our cemeteries, those who utilize our cemeteries as places for prayer and meditation, or those who come to our

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cemeteries to render services either to families or cemetery management and operations.

The third group that must be considered includes the Catholic Church itself, its rituals, disciplines and procedures, cemetery management and all cemetery support staff who are charged not only with the application of the Church's directives, but who also must interact with families requiring our services, or visitors and others who come to the cemeteries to render services either on behalf of families or cemetery management.

These Rules and Regulations are designed to chart a course of mutual cooperation and protection for all of these groups and the individuals within them. They are intended to help sanctify the living memories of those buried within the cemeteries and to create an environment within the cemeteries that awakens faith and brings consolation. The enforcement of the rules will assist in protecting the cemeteries, creating and preserving their beauty, and ensuring that the interests of all concerned parties are equally addressed.

Many families wish to decorate their loved one's burial place as an expression of their love and caring. The cemetery has to balance these desires with more practical concerns of appearance and upkeep. While not everyone will agree with all the rules, we ask that everyone accept them as contributing to our common goal - a well kept cemetery. The placement of cemetery tributes, whether floral or of some other type, is strictly regulated for the common good of all gravesites and crypts. No placed tribute, whether floral or otherwise is considered permanent to the burial site.

Rules and Regulations play a most important part in the beautification and preservation of the sacred resting-place of the faithful departed. They are intended not as restraining, but rather as defining an orderly plan of operation, care and permanent maintenance.

Tags?

Sometimes the cemetery will place additional posted signs and violation (or warning) tags placed on decorations to assist us in alerting visitors to the rules and in preventing added sorrow to bereaving family members that discover decorations have been removed from the gravesite or crypt area.

In between scheduled and seasonal clean-ups, the cemetery staff may choose to arrange to tag these specific items placed in violation as a reminder of the cemetery rules and regulations. These tags help us to educate the public on the cemetery rules. On occasion, items not allowed are placed after the tagging process is completed, and inquiring visitors frequently remove tags. The cemetery makes

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every effort to enforce rules and regulations uniformly and with compassion. We acknowledge and regret instances that appear contrary to this act.

Below are samples of tags placed on items. These tags are used as an additional instruction to a lot owner or visitor to remove an item/object from the burial space.

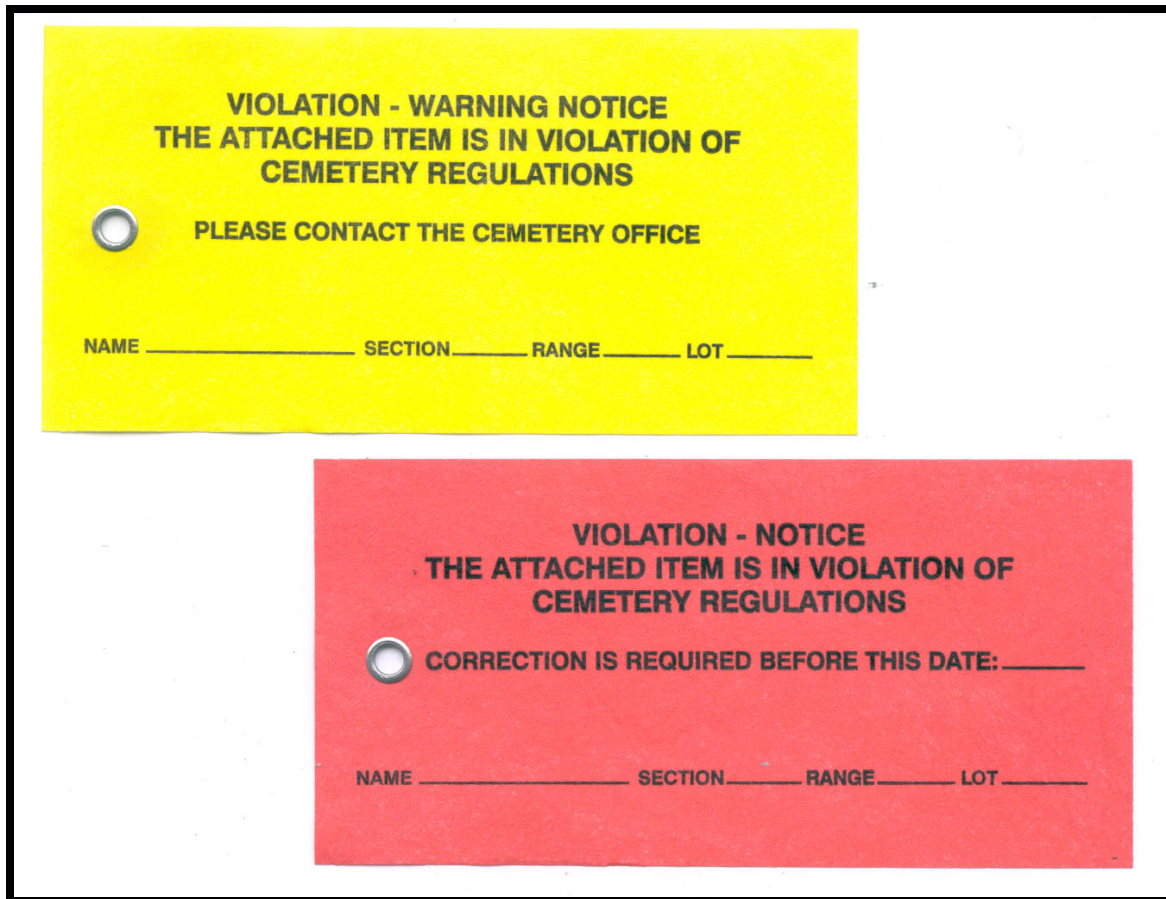
This tag may or may not be used with another action of ongoing rules and regulation enforcement. Some examples of other actions include the warrant of an objects immediate removal, seasonally related enforcement, safety conditions warranting removal, or even in cases where additional notice such as a written letter is forwarded to a family (most shrub violations).

Generally, the use of these tags are deemed an acceptable and reasonable action to place the tag on an item that cannot be removed at the moment a violation is identified. It also serves as an additional means to discourage other visitors from repeating the violation at other lot locations.

This is a courtesy notice extended to the public for education purposes. The use of a tag promotes better visitor/worker relationships. As always stated, the cemetery reserves the right to remove and dispose of all items placed in violation, or when items become either unsightly or out of season. These actions are taken with or without notice as stated in the published rules and regulations.

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## Infractions and Corrections? –No Notice Given and No Compensation Permitted?

The cemetery reserves the right to remove decorations that have deteriorated, as well as decorations that do not meet the guidelines in order to maintain the beauty, dignity, and safety of the cemetery grounds including gravesites, shrines, chapel and mausoleum areas.

The cemetery cannot be responsible for decorations that are removed. Damage resulting from improper decorations cannot be covered for reimbursement nor can the cemetery assume responsibility for decorations disappearance. Rectification of any damage shall be the grave/crypt/niche-owner or the heirs of the grave/crypt/niche-owner.

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Approved items can be removed also?

- **Decorations should not be on the ground outside specified designated planting and decorating areas for the gravesites and crypts because they obstruct access to adjacent lots or crypts and present a safety hazard to staff, equipment and other visitors.**
- **Management reserves the right to change, modify, or rescind the rules and regulations as it seems fit and deems necessary.**
- **The general beauty and maintenance of the cemetery grounds (gravesites and the mausoleum areas) naturally suffers to the extent that time and labor is consumed in correcting infractions of the rules. If infractions are permitted or overlooked, it would tend to result in increased infractions.**
- **The Cemetery staff does dispose of decorations placed at the gravesite or crypt that are in violation of the published rules. The cemetery staff is often instructed to take these materials away from public view to discourage others from placing similar items at the grave or crypt.**
- **In compiling the regulations and in considering revisions, we try to strike a balance between the natural desire of family members to decorate individual gravesites, crypts, niches, and the overriding obligation to maintain the appearance of the cemetery with the resources at our disposal.**
- **It is always difficult to make rules and regulations applicable to a wide and diverse group of persons. Catholic Cemeteries' rules are the standard regulations of the vast majority of cemeteries. The goal of cemetery planting and decorating regulations is to make the cemetery grounds neat and clean with an atmosphere of simplicity and elegance. These regulations also ensure that the cemetery grounds are a safe place for both visitors and workers. We certainly appreciate and commend one's love of devotional objects of great personal sentiment. *Hence regulations are necessary.***
- **Rules and Regulations play a most important part in the beautification and preservation of the sacred resting-place of the faithfully departed. They are intended not as restraining, but rather as defining an orderly plan of operation, care and permanent maintenance.**
- **We are aware that this statement will not be pleasing to some lot owner and visitors, but we sincerely trust they will understand the necessity of complying with the regulations.**

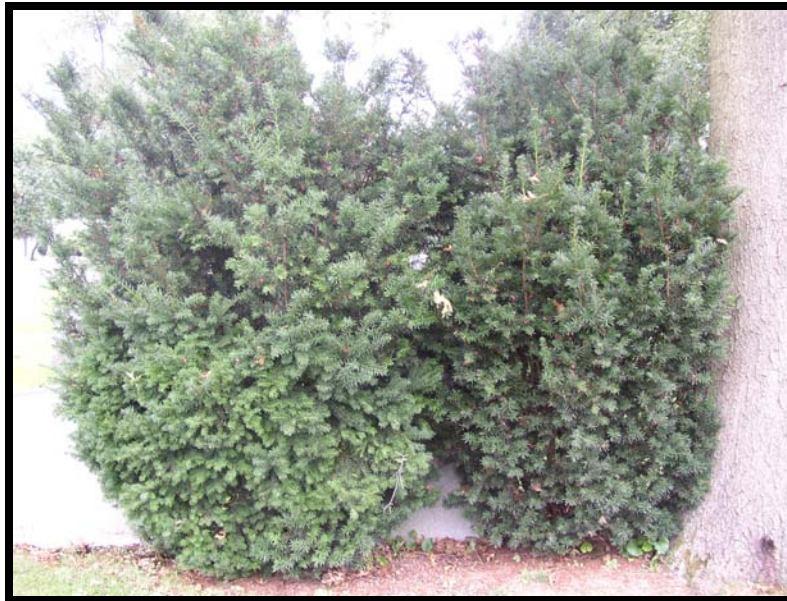
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Why not just a little statute?

Angels, saints and other appropriate images are permitted when approved as a design of the monument erected at the burial lot. The placing of statuary or figurines at the lot is not permitted. These items will chip or will break. These items become weathered (from snow and rain), and many such items have been frequently found moved from their original placement. These items stain the monument leaving permanent, difficult to remove, un-welcomed marks. As families being to place such items at the lot, others see it and continue to place additional items, more items and larger items each added to the point where families have demanded that the cemetery enforce its regulations.

Over the years we have experienced many problems regarding the statutes and other objects and decorations placed on or near the grave monuments. They are often separated from their original placement and become obstacles to machinery and thereby can cause harm and injury to visitors and workers. Another problem arises when some lotowners keep adding statutes and decorations on the grave. This condition grows worse as other people follow this practice. As a result there are sections of the cemetery where there are so many of these decorations on the graves that other lotowners and visitors have complained and have demanded that the cemetery enforce the regulations.



*Most people would agree that the gravesite above lacks proper maintenance. The memorial behind these bushes cannot be seen.*

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## **Shrubs, Bushes and other Perennials?**

**Unrestricted plantings of shrub and perennials present two serious problems. A gravesite is often less than three feet in width and less than ten feet. Except for the space occupied by the headstone, all the rest of the space is needed for interment use. It is neither practical nor possible to transplant shrubs and perennials whenever there is an interment.**

**Our resources do not permit the first alternative and we cannot abdicate our responsibility to maintain the cemetery. On larger grave-holdings which have extra land that can be dedicated to plantings, and for which families have received permission, we do allow limited plantings in the belief that, just as with trees and shrubs we plant, they do add to the overall beauty of the cemetery.**

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### Shrubs & Bushes?

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*Did you know you should obtain Permission to Plant Shrubs?  
Here are the Planting and Decorating Rules and Regulations for this:*

- Shrubs and bushes are permitted on three grave (wide) lots and larger. To avoid constant trimming, slow-growing shrubs such as dwarf boxwood, Dwarf Alberta Spruce (*Picea glauca Conica*), or Ilex Crenata Convera (Butter Scotch) are recommended. No permanent plantings are allowed on single or double graves. These plantings will be removed without notice.
- No shrub or bush is to exceed the following height restrictions, preferably they should be kept four (4) to six (6) inches below the maximum size permitted. The height restrictions are as follows: Three feet for a lot that consists of three graves recorded on the same Certificate. Four feet for a lot that consists of four graves recorded on the same Certificate. Five feet for a lot that consists of five graves recorded on the same Certificate. Six feet for a lot that consists of more than five graves recorded on the same Certificate. No shrub or bush is to exceed the height of the door on a family mausoleum. The cemetery management shall be the sole judge to the design or shape and portion of the maintained shrubbery.
- Shrubs and bushes are planted on the sides of the family memorial only. Never in the floral placement or planting area. Placed shrubs may extend the width of the memorial plus 16 inches in front and the rear (if same lot). **At no time shall the planting encroach upon any other lot.** Other Perennials, vines, climbers, hedging or rose bushes are not permitted.
- The maintenance (care) for the plantings remain the responsibility of the family. Failure to maintain the plants shall be deemed as sufficient and final notice to cemetery management authorizing their immediate removal without notice or compensation to the certificate holder or the certificate holder's heirs or anyone.
- Cemetery personnel take reasonable care to safeguard all plantings. Nevertheless, due to the great number of visitors to the cemetery, it is impossible to guarantee these items from theft, damage or loss. Items placed in violation of these rules will be removed and disposed of without notice or compensation.

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- Plant at your Own Risk. The cemetery may require the temporary removal of shrubbery from the planted area to accommodate a burial within the lot or at times the adjacent lot. Due to conditions and equipment surrounding burial procedures families will not be notified of the plant's removal. The plant may remain unearthed for a period of several days subject to all types of weather conditions.
- For this reason the cemetery accepts no responsibility to the vitality of the plant nor guarantee its vitality upon replanting thereafter.
- The cemetery reserves the right to remove and dispose shrubbery whereas in cemetery management's judgment infestation (poor health), safety, overall appearance, or lawn damage can or has occurred. Plants that stain monuments or lawn areas may also be removed without notice.
- Consent to plant is granted to the lot owner or the lot owners heirs only. Firms (Contractors) are prohibited from planting or maintaining the shrubs unless serving as an agent of the family. The cemetery will not be a third party to a contract or agreement expressed or otherwise stated by a landscape contractor, florist, or nursery. All work completed on cemetery grounds must be approved by cemetery management with proper insurance coverage on file.
- Certificate holders and their heirs should report a Change of Address to cemetery authorities. The cemetery management deems legal and other notification final to the last record of address on file.



## Community Mausoleums have decorating regulations too?

**Due to recent inquiries and complaints to the cemetery office, it has become necessary to notify families and remind them that the cemetery does not permit photos, stickers, emblems, or other objects to be attached to the crypt fronts. Taped items detract from the mausoleum's community style appearance. Taped items destroy the polished finished surface of granite and marble. Items taped to a crypt (or niche) cover for an extended period of time can stain and soil the surface.**

**Granite in general maintains a beautiful long lasting appearance: when not touched by human hands (avoid oil absorption), when soil and water is kept away from it (hence no flowers, no water, no soil, or biodegraded material) to come in contact with the surface.**

**Please arrange for the removal of any of these items from your mausoleum crypt front. From our own experience, damage occurs to the polished finish on the crypt cover and damage can occur to the object placed on the crypt front due to**

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weathering conditions and at the time the cover requires handling such as at removal for burial.

As a reminder to you and the many visitors to our chapel and garden mausoleums please be advised of the following rules and regulations:

## Community Mausoleums & Columbariums:

Where floral tables are provided, bouquets of fresh flowers are permitted. Artificial bouquets are permitted from November 1st until one week after Easter. Arrangements will be removed when they become unsightly or out of season. In chapels and buildings where tables are not provided, the cemetery will provide floral arrangements as decoration. Responsibility for the proper maintenance of all lawns, trees, shrubbery and ornamental plantings surrounding community mausoleum and columbarium facilities rests with Cemetery Management. Community mausoleums and columbarium areas require acts of sharing of common areas including the walkways, benches, and floral stands. With many people buried in close proximity, the cemetery management must restrict visitors by limiting the size and the number of floral bouquets placed in these areas.

Wreaths, designs, pictures and other decorative or devotional objects are not permitted in community mausoleums and columbarium areas. All objects shall be removed that violate regulations or when, in the judgment of Cemetery Management, their appearance and condition warrant removal.

- **CUT FLOWERS, PLANTS AND WINTER DECORATIONS** will be permitted in the corridors in designated areas. They will be allowed **ONLY** when placed in the **PLASTIC** pots and will be removed when they are unsightly or out of season. No other type or size pots will be permitted.
- All visitors are urged to **SECURELY TAG** all items placed at the crypt with the **Family Name** and crypt location numbers. This will enable our **Field Personnel** to return approved items to the appropriate area in the event plants and decorations are moved by our staff.
- **INDIVIDUAL CHAPEL (ALTAR) DECORATIONS** are not permitted; decorating the sanctuary and chapel, corridors, windows, and statues or features shall be the sole responsibility of the Cemetery.
- **WREATHS, DESIGNS** and all other **DECORATIVE** or **DEVOTIONAL OBJECTS** are **NOT ALLOWED**.

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- **ALL OBJECTS SHALL BE REMOVED** which violate regulations or when in judgment of the cemetery superintendent, their appearance and condition warrant removal. If a planting, decoration, or permanent vase holder is **PLACED IN VIOLATION** of the cemetery's regulation, the cemetery shall **REMOVE** and **DISPOSE** of such objects **WITHOUT PRIOR NOTIFICATION OR COMPENSATION** to the owner.
- **Crosses, vases, permanent flower holders, votive lights, plastic images (e.g. - statutes), toys, photos and other similar articles are NOT PERMITTED ON OR AT THE CRYPT OR IN THE CEMETERY GARDEN AREAS.** The Cemetery Management reserves the right, without prior notice, to remove the same, now erected or hereafter planted or placed.
- **RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROPER MAINTENANCE** of all lawns, trees and shrubs rests solely with the community mausoleums and cemetery grounds. Recorded Deed-holders and visitors are requested to refrain from watering, mowing, fertilizing, planting or disturbing turf in any manner.
- **Because the Cemetery is open to the public, it is impossible to control the activity of every visitor. WE CANNOT GUARANTEE DECORATIONS FROM DAMAGE OR DISAPPEARANCE.**
- **Artificial Flowers and other designs are permitted only during the period November 1st through one week after Easter.**

**For Gravesites, Family Mausoleums, and Lawn Crypts specific rules and regulations apply. Contact the cemetery office for a copy of these specific rules and regulations.**

**If the item is of great sentimental or monetary value to you and you still decide to place it at the burial site you do so with the understanding that the item can be damaged, disposed of, or taken away by the cemetery staff, or by persons unknown to us. Items returned directly to the gravesite is interpreted as a willful violation of cemetery rules.**

### **Decoration Programs Offered by Catholic Cemeteries**

Catholic Cemeteries offers an array of floral and decoration programs for cemetery lots, crypts, and niches. Stainless Steel Portraits, Crypt and Niche Floral Vase Program, Seasonal Programs (Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Christmas), votive and memorial candles at our chapels, gravesite floral bouquet holders, and personalized kiosk memorials.

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Catholic Cemeteries offer monthly mass in remembrance of the deceased, special field masses on Memorial Day and All Souls Day, an annual celebration of Candle Vespers, and commemoration of Our Lord's death on Good Friday with the Stations of the Cross. Catholic Cemeteries proclaim the hope of the resurrection and the belief in life everlasting.

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