

# Catholic Cemeteries — Decorations



Catholic Cemeteries of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre, Inc

Updated December 2018

## Decorations—General Rules & Guidelines

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. They 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 items permitted are considered permanent to the lot. Those items of a more permanent nature that are permitted — such as the monument, floral bouquet holders, and stainless steel portraits of the deceased (affixed to the monument) — are regulated for their size, material composition, and placement.

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Management is committed that our Catholic Cemeteries are well maintained and image the Church's respect for the dignity of each individual human person. The rules of our cemeteries are similar (and in many cases more generous and less restrictive) than the rules found at other cemeteries. For years, we have discussed this very issue and similar trends with members of cemetery associations in the metropolitan area, statewide, and nationally. We sincerely believe that we are doing the most good for people and 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 on decorations have indeed been expressed. The balance ranges from a simple “why not” allow 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.** Oftentimes 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 do change over a period of time. If you are hurting, if you are angry, we can assure that, over time, these feelings can and do change.

At times, a visitor may have a knee jerk reaction when he or she 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 ask for acceptance and cooperation in supporting the rules and regulations. 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 prevail. We regret if these actions are interpreted as unfriendly or lacking in service; however, we feel at times these actions are necessary.

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## CEMETERY RULES & REGULATIONS

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. All of us in the 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 of 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:

- The first group is those who are buried, entombed, or inurned in our cemeteries. 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, and 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 cemeteries to render services either to families or cemetery management.
- The third group 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 assists 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.

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## General Planting & Decorating Regulations—Gravesites

- In general, fresh cut flowers are welcome, regardless of season. Cut flowers must be placed in the designated area in an approved container. Flowers must be removed when dead, and vases inverted when not in use.
- Annual flowers may be planted within a **semi-circle of 18”** in front of the monument. Plants such as geraniums, marigolds, begonias, and ageratum are especially well-suited for this purpose.
- Potted plants are permitted to be placed on graves for the Holy Days and Holidays but will be removed one week after the day of celebration, unless removed from pots and planted in the ground, where permitted.
- Christmas decorations in the form of a wreath or blanket may be placed on the gravesites. These items and all other Christmas decorations will be removed beginning January 15th.
- Please refer to the document ***Seasonal Decorations and Plantings*** for the schedule on when holiday decorations are permitted to be placed throughout the year, and when these decorations will be removed.
- Artificial flowers are permitted **only during the winter months** (from November 1 until one week after Easter).
- Flags for decoration must not exceed **12x16 inches**. No more than two flags are permitted on any one plot; **one must be an American flag**. Faded, soiled or torn flags will be removed at the sole discretion of the cemetery.
- All work performed by mechanical equipment or power tools of any kind is strictly prohibited. Hand trimming around memorials, weeding, and permitted shrubbery at your family plot is permitted and encouraged.
- No lot shall be raised above the established grade.
- No ornamental tree, bush, or large shrubbery that is part of the overall cemetery landscape may be used for any form of grave decoration at any time.
- To protect the safety of field employees and visitors, some items are **not permitted** in the planting area and may not be placed or affixed to monuments. Examples of prohibited items include, **but are not limited to:**

Wooden crosses	Pin-wheels	Banners	Glass jars	Planters	Statues
Earthenware pots	Crockery	Bric-a-brac	Tin Cans	Shells	Balloons
Stones/Pebbles	Marble chips	Vigil lights	Edging	Bottles	Toys

***Because the cemetery is open to the public, with thousands of visitors each year, the cemetery cannot guarantee plants and decorations from DAMAGE, THEFT, or DISAPPEARANCE. The cemetery will not be responsible for plant or shrub damage caused by wildlife. The cemetery reserves the right to remove any decoration without notice when deemed as unsightly or out of season in accordance with the cemetery’s planting and decorating rules and regulations.***

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## What about Shrubs, Bushes, and other Perennials?

Unrestricted plantings of shrub and perennials can present serious problems. Most gravesites are less than three feet in width less than ten feet in length. 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 this 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.

**Please refer to the Planting and Decorating Rules and Regulations for the full guidelines for planting shrubs and bushes. Here are some of the important guidelines:**

- Plot owners must obtain permission from the cemetery to plant shrubs or bushes.
- Shrubs and bushes are permitted on plots that are **three graves wide or 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. Other perennials, vines, climbers, hedging
- **No permanent plantings are allowed on single or double graves.** These 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:
  - ◇ Three (3) grave plot: maximum height three (3) feet
  - ◇ Four (4) grave plot: maximum height four (4) feet
  - ◇ Five (5) grave plot: maximum height five (5) feet
  - ◇ Six (6) grave plot or larger: maximum height six (6) feet
  - ◇ Family Mausoleums: Shrub/bush must not exceed the height of the door on a family mausoleum.
- Shrubs and bushes should be planted on the **sides of the family memorial only**—never in the floral placement or planting area. Shrubs and bushes are not to extend in front or behind the memorial in excess of 14". **At no time shall the planting encroach upon any other lot.**
- The cemetery management shall be the sole judge to the design or shape and portion of the maintained shrubbery.

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## Additional Information on Shrubs and Plantings

- Maintenance (care) for plantings remains the family's responsibility. 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 takes 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.**
- **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 and subject to all types of weather conditions. For this reason, the cemetery accepts no responsibility to the vitality of the plant nor can the cemetery 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 owner's 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.



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

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## Community Mausoleums—Regulations

- The cemetery **does not** permit photos, stickers, emblems, or other objects to be attached to crypt/niche fronts.
  - Taped items detract from the mausoleum's community style appearance. Taped items also destroy the polished finished surface of granite and marble, and 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) and when soil and water is kept away from it (hence no flowers, no water, no soil, or biodegraded material).
  - Please arrange for the removal of any of these items from your mausoleum crypt front to avoid damage to the polished finish on the crypt cover. The objects themselves can also be damaged due to weathering conditions or at the time the crypt cover requires handling (such as at removal for burial).
- At no time may flowers or any other articles be attached to crypt/niche fronts. Flowers or other articles (balloons, etc) are also not permitted in the corridors of the mausoleum.
- 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.
- 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, cemetery management must restrict visitors by limiting the size and the number of floral bouquets placed in these areas.
- Responsibility for the proper maintenance of all lawns, trees, shrubbery and ornamental plantings surrounding community mausoleum and columbarium facilities rests with cemetery management.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.**

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## Enforcement of Rules & Regulations

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.*

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.

## Why not just a little statue?

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 can chip, break, or become weathered (from snow and rain), and many such items have been frequently found moved from their original placement. These items can also stain the monument leaving permanent, difficult to remove, unwelcomed marks.

Over the years we have experienced many problems regarding statues and other objects placed on or near the grave monuments. They are often separated from their original placement and become obstacles to machinery, with the potential to cause harm and injury to visitors and workers. Another problem arises when lot owners 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 lot owners and visitors have complained and have demanded that the cemetery enforce the regulations.

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## VIOLATION TAGS

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

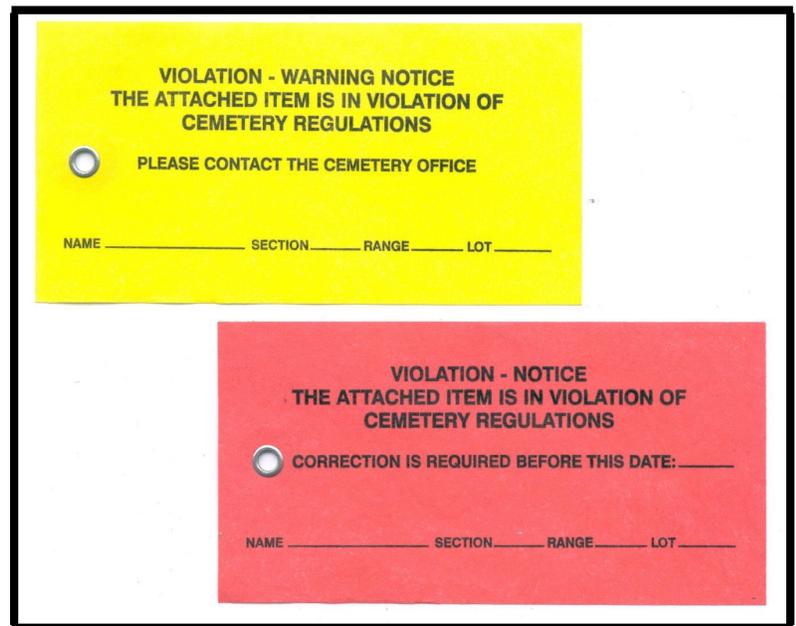
In between scheduled and seasonal clean-ups, the cemetery staff may choose to tag these specific items placed in violation as a reminder of the cemetery rules and regulations. These tags help us to educate the public on the cemetery rules. On occasion, items not allowed are placed after the tagging process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

These tags 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 object's immediate removal, seasonally related enforcement, safety conditions warranting removal, or cases (such as shrub violations) where additional notice such as a written letter is forwarded to the family.

Generally, it is deemed an acceptable and reasonable action to place a 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 educational 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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## 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 notices, the signed rules at the time of purchase, and cemetery literature (including our website and 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 are intended to be compassionate and thoughtful — not a punitive action. **The regulations do state “to remove and discard without notice or compensation”.**

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 the disappearance of decorations. Rectification of any damage shall be the responsibility of the grave/crypt/niche owner or their heirs.

## Approved items were removed and discarded. Why?

- Decorations should not be on the ground outside of specified designated planting and decorating areas because they obstruct access to adjacent lots or crypts and present a safety hazard to staff, equipment and other visitors.
- Decorations that have deteriorated may be removed in order to maintain the cemetery’s beauty and dignity.
- Management reserves the right to change, modify, or rescind the rules and regulations as it seems fit and deems necessary.

## Decoration Programs offered by Catholic Cemeteries

Catholic Cemeteries offers an array for floral and decoration programs for cemetery lots, crypts, and niches. Available products and programs include stainless steel portraits, crypt/niche floral vase program, seasonal decorations (Easter, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and Christmas), emblems for crypts/niches, votive and memorial candles at our chapels, and gravesite floral bouquet holders.

Please visit our website ([www.ccdrcinc.org](http://www.ccdrcinc.org)) or contact our cemetery office for more details and to participate in these programs.

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