



Guidelines for Memorial Gardens in the Diocese of Michigan

The history of memorial gardens in the Diocese of Michigan is a long cherished and heartfelt one. It has been the tradition of many of our congregations to offer this very important extension of pastoral care to our families by way of these sacred spaces of commemoration on our church grounds.

We all share the goal of our diocese consisting of healthy, vibrant congregations, and a wish that memorial gardens associated with our congregations would remain in place forever. The reality is, however, that this is neither possible, nor even desirable. We know that ministries grow and change over the years. We also know that in some instances, we are called to celebrate the work that has gone on before, and discern the new life and mission God has in store for us. Given this, it is impossible to predict today which congregations will be in place 5 or 10 or 100 years from now. Therefore, as much as we would like to, we cannot guarantee the long-term future of any memorial garden.

Memorial gardens associated with congregations and ministries in the Diocese need to be formed and maintained in a manner consistent with this reality. The following guidelines are suggested ways in which congregations may provide for the pastoral care of a memorial garden while safeguarding fiduciary duties to parishioners in future generations.

- ◇ The congregation should develop and maintain written policies with respect to the memorial garden. The policies should be available to all parishioners and should be provided to anyone considering placing cremains in the memorial garden. Copies of the policies should be on file in the diocesan office.
- ◇ **Michigan law does not regulate the establishment, maintenance or closing of memorial gardens. This fact should be made clear to anyone considering placing cremains in the memorial garden.**
- ◇ Memorial gardens are not cemeteries or columbariums. For this reason, cremains should be buried in biodegradable containers or otherwise placed in a manner that will permit them to return to nature.
- ◇ Care should be taken to record and, to the extent possible, maintain contact information for families of those whose cremains are placed in the memorial garden.

- ◇ No congregation may guarantee or promise that the memorial garden will be maintained for any specific period of time or in perpetuity.
- ◇ Congregations should not charge a fee, require a donation, or in any way link a gift or donation to the placement of cremains in the memorial garden. Doing so could be construed as a contract that the congregation and/or the Diocese may not be able to honor in the future.
- ◇ **When a ministry ends:** Should a congregation close or the circumstance of the property warrant the deconsecrating and closing of a memorial garden, all steps taken are with abiding pastoral care for those families affected. When possible, arrangements are made for the relocation of the memorial garden to other consecrated property: a nearby cemetery or the property of another congregation. A recomittal service is held to which the families that can be contacted are invited. Families, if they choose, are also free to move representative soil from the memorial garden to a location meaningful to them.
- ◇ **If a congregation currently has a memorial garden in place:** New guidelines should be adopted in keeping with the information in this document and followed from this point forward. Family records and maps (when applicable) for cremains already interred should be reviewed and updated.
- ◇ **If your congregation is planning a new memorial garden:** Your planning committee will need to carefully consider and incorporate all of the guidelines in this document in your plan. Again, your local policy should be on file in the diocesan office.

In closing, although no one can guarantee the future of any memorial garden, relocations of memorial gardens occur rarely. When they must occur, it is our obligation and desire to respond with great pastoral care and concern, in a manner respectful of all involved.

*Guidelines approved by Diocesan Council
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