



# Catholic Cemeteries

## *Archdiocese of Philadelphia*

### Answers to your questions about the signs with the Cemetery Rules

1] *Question:* Why did you decide to install new signs at all of the Archdiocesan cemeteries?

The decision to install new signs was in recognition of the fact that as time passes, lot holders & visitors tend to forget what they knew are the rules in the cemeteries, and instead are just acting on assumptions they make.

2] *Question:* Why are there so many “rules” listed on the signs?

The reason we had to list so many details on the signs was guided by our desire to be of service to all the people who have family or friends that they wish to visit at the cemeteries, and to provide people with the information they need. The rules are intended to protect those visiting the cemetery as well as those working in the cemetery.

3] *Question:* But do you really need all those things that are listed?

Yes, we have learned that you can't take anything for granted, and thus you have to detail the basic items just to make sure you alert visitors, so they will be aware of these issues, and will be able to visit safely. In our changing world, the safety of cemetery visitors is a great concern, and we must alert visitors so they take the necessary precautions.

4] *Question:* Do you really have to lock all of the gates to the cemetery?

Yes, again this is a safety precaution. The act of closing the gates indicates that the cemetery is private property and that anyone on the property when the gates are open should be there for the appropriate reason. It is also a help in preventing vandalism and theft during the evening and night hours.

5] *Question:* Do you really have to mention the issue of observing traffic signs?

Yes, all too often drivers tend to forget the rules of the road, and basic courtesy when driving in the cemetery. Thus the need to specifically remind everyone to drive carefully, courteously and **slowly** when in the cemetery. All too often there are accidents between vehicles, or people who are walking are in danger, or monuments are damaged by careless drivers.

6] *Question:* Why are you asking for current addresses?

The norm in America these days is for people to move. And when they move generally the last place they think about when sending out their change of address is the cemetery. Thus, if the cemetery must contact a family regarding their cemetery lot or monument, often the last known address is no longer valid, and the cemetery is left to believe there are no longer any family members for that cemetery lot. That gives the impression that the lot will never be used again or needed. So a current address is critical for proving there is still family in existence.

7] *Question:* Just floral decorations?

Yes, the norm has always been that families visiting the cemetery would bring a few flowers to decorate the grave, thus showing their love and respect. Floral items are a natural in a cemetery, and, while beautifying the cemetery, do not detract or cause the cemetery to look unsightly.

8] *Question:* But, why can't I bring any of those other things they are now selling everywhere? If they are selling them, they must be okay?

Actually no. As you know there is a tendency in America today to invent all sorts of items, for every part of our lives, and then attempt to convince us these items are wonderful and necessary, and we can't do without them. But, in the cemetery many of these decorations only become the source of problems. They can even make the graves look unsightly. They can be dangerous, since often they are items people can take and throw at others. They are expensive to gather up, and with trash disposal costs rising add a major burden to the cemetery's operation. And, with safety in mind, we know that parts of them can end up in the grass and when cutting the grass the lawn mowers hit the bits and pieces and hurl them long distances. Floral items are far safer and simpler.

9] *Question:* But my loved one always was a football fan, or hockey fan, or loved Halloween..... Why can't I bring items such as that for their grave?

Again, it's a matter of maintaining the dignity and appearance of the cemetery. Also the problem of people who will steal such items from graves for their own use. The theft of decorations from graves is common these days.

If you wish to honor the memory of your loved one, and recognize their special interest in some particular holiday, or activity, etc., bringing that paraphernalia to the cemetery is not the way to achieve that goal. Far better to remember them in prayer, at Mass, or by donations to a charity that is linked to those interests. The money spent on some of these decorations (which are then thrown away) would do more for their memory if donated to help those in need. Your loved one will be as aware of the donation as they would be of placing something at the grave. As St. Monica said when she was dying: *“Lay this body where you will, only remember me at the altar of the Lord.”*

10] *Question:* Why can't I leave a planter or flower box on the grave, it makes it so much easier and lasts longer?

The planters or so-called flower boxes are a major problem as they interfere with not only mowing the grass, but even more trimming around the monument. If we don't move them, and don't trim, folks complain we are not taking care of the cemetery. If we do try to move them and trim, they are so heavy it adds a lot of time for the workers, and in some cases causes harm to the workers when they have to move heavy boxes around all day. Your one box looks nice to you, but the cemetery has to deal with hundreds - so it becomes a major issue.

11] *Question:* Why can't I make a border of stones, or edging material, or wood around the monument?

Again, it becomes a maintenance nightmare. The cemetery can't clean, cut and maintain the whole cemetery if the crew spends so much time giving individual attention to each lot due to all of the personal gardens and items you may place there. It just isn't possible to get the work done.

12] *Question:* But, its my lot!

Please remember when you have a lot in the cemetery, you only have the “right of burial” you do not own the land. In the cemetery all of the land belongs to the cemetery, thus you can't treat a cemetery lot as if it were your own yard. And since the cemetery serves so many people, the only way to maintain order and keep the cemetery as a dignified resting place for everyone's loved ones, is to have rules regarding the decorations at the graves.

13] *Question:* How do I know when to bring decorations to the grave?

The signs list all of the standard or routine clearing periods for the cemetery. Basically one week after the listed holydays and holidays. But, since the cemeteries are large, and the staff must also do many other tasks as part of their work in the cemetery, and we must take into account the weather, for all those reasons we note on the signs that it may take more than week to clear the whole cemetery. Please watch for the signs that state “clearing is in progress” and for our workers, so that you will know when the clearing is over and you can again bring decorations to your lot.

*[sign #1]*

Hours of Operation: Visitors are permitted in the cemetery from 9am until 4 pm each day of the week. All gates will be locked by 4:30 pm.

Please observe all traffic safety signs

Please do not drive or park vehicles on the grass areas of the cemetery.

No dogs (with the exception of guide dogs) or other pets are allowed in the cemetery.

Caution is required when walking on the cemetery grounds. Natural conditions often result in uneven terrain. Please watch where you are walking.

Please secure all valuables. Do not leave your car unlocked when you are away from it. The cemetery is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

Lot holders please make sure your current address is on file in the cemetery office.

Please report problems or concerns at the cemetery office.

*[sign #2]*

Please help us maintain the beauty and dignity of these sacred grounds by observing the following regulations:

Floral decorations (fresh flowers, artificial flowers, potted plants) are permitted at all times.

All decorations will be removed for immediate disposal beginning one (1) week after all holydays and holidays, including Easter, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints Day and Christmas. Please allow a few weeks for us to complete the removal process.

All other decorations such as planter boxes (concrete, metal, wood or plastic), glass containers or vases, toys, balloons, any type of flag (other than the American Flag), candles, votive lights, etc. are prohibited and subject to immediate removal and disposal.

The cemetery reserves the right at any time to remove any decorations that have been damaged or become unsightly.

The planting of shrubs, trees, flowers, etc. on individual graves or lots is prohibited and subject to immediate removal and disposal.

Fencing or borders consisting of shells, stones, pebbles or other materials are prohibited and subject to immediate removal and disposal. The cemetery is not responsible for any articles or floral decorations left on burial plots.