

Proposal for Depositing Cremains on Church Grounds

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1. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has taken a position that cremation is a legitimate practice for Lutheran Christians. <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/lcms-views#cremation>
2. Members of Our Savior desire the option of depositing cremains here, which allows their bodies to rest in the “holy ground” of the church and is much less expensive than burial in a cemetery. Of 32 people who attended two informational meetings in May 2019, virtually all said they wanted the church to make this available. Many said they would seriously consider this option for themselves, and seven individuals or couples said they would be willing to prepay.
3. The 32 people were split on two disposal options for themselves: 1) a memorial garden, where cremains could be deposited in the ground (perhaps with the name of the deceased placed on a nearby plaque), and 2) a columbarium, or metal-and-stone structure with niches where ashes could be deposited and the name of the deceased placed on the niche. The niches typically have space for cremains of two people. Most members said they would like both options to be available. The committee believes that both options could be combined at one spot

on the church grounds. There are no county or state legal requirements associated with establishing, using, moving or disestablishing columbarium or cremain memorial garden sites.

4. Both a memorial garden and a columbarium have costs. 1) A memorial garden would bear the cost of purchasing plants and planting materials as well as long-term maintenance and replanting. Also, the committee recommends paying a landscape architect or landscaper – or using a volunteer in the congregation with similar credentials – for a prosed location and garden design, and possibly paying for labor to install the garden. Additionally, a plaque of bronze or other metal would need to be purchased to mount in the garden, probably on the wall of the church. A loose cost estimate would be \$3,000 to \$5,000, which would include establishment of a modest maintenance fund. 2) A 24-niche columbarium, with a concrete pad underneath, would cost \$8,000 to \$10,000. Creating both options, then, might range in cost from \$11,000 to \$15,000.

5. There would be individual costs for each family depositing cremains at the church. For those burying cremains in the memorial garden, the family would pay the modest cost for a nameplate to be put on the plaque. A family choosing to place cremains in a columbarium niche would buy a nameplate or pay for an etching on the face of the niche to identify the deceased.

6. More significantly, the families should be charged a fee for each option to offset the church's original costs and ongoing maintenance costs, the committee believes. There could be a lesser charge for depositing cremains in the garden since the garden's cost is lower than that of the columbarium. The committee suggests that a family be charged \$500 for cremains deposited in the garden, and \$1,000 for a columbarium niche. (The niche would cost the same whether the family intended to depose cremains of two people or just one.) The proceeds of both memorial-garden deposition and columbarium niche purchases could be split between the church's general fund and a designated memorial garden maintenance fund – perhaps 70% general fund, 30% maintenance fund. When installation costs of both are eventually recouped, all money should go into the maintenance fund.

7. When families arrange for deposition of cremains, the church needs to inform them of the future possibility, however remote, that the church might move to another location or close altogether. In the case of a move, the church should take and install the columbarium at the new location, and also move the soil that holds cremains to the new location. In the case of closing, the church should commit to attempting to contact the families of deceased persons whose cremains are in the columbarium to offer them the cremains. Upon closure, all buried cremains would be left in the ground, and all columbarium cremains where families were not located, or where families did not want the cremains, would be disposed of as the church saw fit. Families would have to sign a contract that included a waiver acknowledging these possibilities and agreeing to the plan.

8. The location of a memorial garden and columbarium could be determined with the help of a landscape architect or landscaper. A site recommended by two members with architectural or landscaping expertise is the southern end of the church building outside the prayer room (as shown above in the overhead view and photos).

9. The church should see if 10 to 15 families are ready to prepay for a columbarium or memorial-garden spot. That would finance the initial costs.

10. The deposition of cremains should be restricted to church members and to their spouses, parents and children.

Have questions? Contact John McVey of the Governance Board at oslc.tutoring@gmail.com or Joe Murchison of the Study Committee at joe@sidebysidelaurel.org.