

Our Mission

To bury the dead, comfort the sorrowful and pray for the living and the dead.

To offer our families choice and flexibility coupled with unmatched service and care within a well-maintained landscape while preserving the dignity and identity of the Catholic Cemetery.

To deny no person a proper and dignified burial regardless of their means.



The Simple, Sustainable Alternative

Natural Burial

Section of St. Kateri Tekakwitha



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GETHSEMANE CEMETERY
& ST. MARY'S CEMETERY

TWO CEMETERIES, ONE MISSION.

About St Kateri Tekakwitha



Our natural burial section is named after St. Kateri Tekakwitha who was known as the “Lily of the Mohawks”. She is the patron saint of both ecology and the environment. Americas’ first native saint, she was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. She was born in 1656 in the Iroquois village of Ossernenon near present day Auriesville, New York. She converted to Catholicism in 1679 on the Feast of the Annunciation.



Our Promise To You

We are well into our second century of providing dignified burial options for Catholics and their families, of the greater Berks County area and we make the following promise: Any phase of an area that has been developed for the sole purpose of natural burial shall remain a natural burial area in perpetuity. Should the area not be sold in its entirety, the remaining graves that have been designated for natural burial shall go unsold rather than converted to any other purpose. You may be assured that the natural burial area you choose today shall remain that way.

Life is Real, life is earnest
and the grave is not its goal,
ashes to ashes, dust to dust returnest
was not spoken of the soul.

*From a Psalm of Life
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

The Section of St Kateri Tekakwitha

The Section of St Kateri Tekakwitha has been designed to be developed in a phased approach, over the course of several years.

The plants, trees and grasses utilized in this section will be installed at different times of the year and in different sections each year to promote the healthiest habitat possible.

Many of the native plants used will take several years to develop into a healthy, natural landscape. Please be patient as we let mother nature develop into what God has provided.



Section of St. Kateri Tekakwitha Guidelines

Natural burial areas are designed to be simple as well as sustainable in all ways. For us to be successful in retaining the sustainable nature of this section, there are certain guidelines that are necessary for success. Please take some time to review the information provided here and feel free to contact us with any questions.

Caskets and Burial Containers:

Only natural and biodegradable containers may be used. Examples include a burial shroud, natural wooden casket or wicker and sea grass type burial pods and caskets.

Burial Vaults:

Burial vaults are generally required to prevent the grounds from settling and causing unsafe conditions to both visitors and machinery. However, burial vaults also hamper the natural burial process and require a great deal of energy and resources, both of which being counterproductive to the ideal. For these reasons, no burial vaults will be permitted, and visitation is limited to the pathways, in the Section of St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

Embalming:

While embalming has become common practice in the United States, there are alternatives available to allow for traditional services to be celebrated in the presence of our deceased loved ones. Only natural embalming alternatives may be used, if so requested, and we ask you to consult your preferred Funeral Home as to what alternatives would best serve the needs of your family.

Interment:

While we are very much aware of the impacts our actions have on our resources, we must always be able to provide timely service to all our families, and under all conditions. Keeping in mind the use of our resources, as well as scheduling and time constraints, the excavation of graves shall be done by machine. However, in keeping with the very purpose of a natural burial section, all graves will be backfilled by hand without the use of machinery, other than that which is necessary to transport staff and equipment. Feel free to contact us for the schedule of current interment fees.

Disinterment:

All interments within the natural burial section are considered permanent, and no disinterment shall be permitted at any time.

Family Participation:

We understand that funerals are very personal events and welcome the opportunity to discuss how you may be able to participate, as fully as reasonably possible, given conditions at that time. We invite you to contact us for additional information.

Visitation:

The height of the foliage and the unevenness of the grounds may pose hazards to visitors. Given the natural setting of the Section of St Kateri Tekakwitha, we must require that you remain on the mowed paths. Graveside visitation will not be permitted outside of the interment service.

Cremation:

While not everyone may agree, numerous studies have shown that the cremation process does consume a significant amount of fossil fuels, contributes to a level of pollutants and is generally not considered green. As such, and in keeping with the natural burial ideal, the interment of cremated remains shall not be permitted in the Section of St Kateri Tekakwitha.

Memorials:

With the section being designed predominantly as a meadow, traditional memorials would serve little purpose as they would not be visible during most of the season. With this in mind, and considering the energy and resources required to provide a traditional memorial, manufactured memorials will not be permitted. For our families that feel more comfortable with a physical marker, natural stones will be available at Gethsemane Cemetery and may be inscribed with the name and years of birth and death. Foundations will not be installed under these stones, and settling and shifting should be expected.

Decorations:

As this section is designed to promote natural burial and provide for a more ecologically diverse setting, no decorations or plantings of any type are permitted. Many plantings become invasive and become a detriment to the natural setting. Any decorations or plantings found will be removed immediately without notice.

Care & Maintenance:

The Section of St Kateri Tekakwitha will be maintained as a natural burial area with native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses being allowed to flourish. Along with these grasses and flowers will be leaves, twigs, insects and wildlife. While our traditional burial areas are maintained in such a way to keep them 'clean' and to mitigate any pests, they will be present in a natural burial setting.

