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## CEMETERY

## NEWSLETTER

*Joseph B. Sankovich, Superintendent  
Mt. Kelly Cemetery, Sacred Heart Parish  
Dearborn, Michigan  
and first year member NCCC Parish Cemetery Committee*

Interest, involvement, support — how does one go about generating such responses from a parish community whose cemetery has undergone periods of extreme neglect over the course of its one hundred and thirteen year existence?

Essentially this was the problem as seen by the superintendent of Mount Kelly seven years ago. Every step taken to revitalize this parish property was taken with an eye toward eliminating the possibility of it ever deteriorating again to the eyesore that it had become in 1951 when the City of Dearborn sent equipment and personnel to remove the debris that had accumulated over the course of a number of years.

Additional steps have been taken during the past seven years, the time during which Mr. Sankovich has been associated with the cemetery. The presence of a bulldozer on the property certainly generated interest and involvement, but at the early stages, very little support. Complete resodding of the four acres, the installation of trees and

decorative bushes, and years of tender and loving care have helped to generate the support necessary for the preservation and development of the remaining space.

The most successful program, by far, has been the twice-yearly circulation of a newsletter to all current lot holders and all members of Sacred Heart Parish, the parish to which the cemetery is attached.

The newsletter was conceived by the superintendent and presented to the members of the Cemetery Board of Directors, a group established in 1971 to oversee the operation of the cemetery and assist in stabilizing its identity in the parish and community. At its May, 1977 meeting the board unanimously approved of the idea, naming the superintendent as editor of the newsletter.

Physically, the item consists of one sheet, 11" x 24", triple-folded to allow for six pages of print. It is produced in quantities of 1800 copies on gray stock, printed with blue ink, identified with the cemetery stationery, one page

given to advertisement and one-half page reserved for imprinting mailing information. A local funeral director and monument dealership completely underwrite the cost of the publication through advertisements. The publication is scheduled for distribution in mid-May and mid-October of each year. All lot holders are currently filed by addressograph plates and prior to each mailing this list is checked for accuracy (an essential step in facilitating this program). Once the mailing to lot holders takes place, the subsequent weekend finds the newsletter included with the parish's weekly bulletin. Distribution costs are kept at a minimum since no envelopes are necessary for mailing and the item is mailed as bulk material.

### **Why a newsletter?**

Rejuvenation is a multifaceted experience. In order to facilitate reestablishment of Mount Kelly Cemetery as a credible institution existing for the well-being of the parish, diocese and community, a

method of communication was deemed essential. Not only is Mount Kelly rich in the history of the Catholic development of the Dearborn area, it is also an active parish and community cemetery. It has been the object of a three-year historical research project, and a means for contacting relatives and descendants of those early interments was deemed essential to this effort. Through the course of history, as is common to many parish cemeteries, records were either poorly kept or nonexistent. Not only has the newsletter been helpful to report on the progress of this effort, but it has provided a vehicle to surface questions relating to this study.

Since Mount Kelly is gaining in popularity, various groups have asked permission to bring students onto the cemetery grounds to do their own school history projects. These, as well as lot holders, need to be constantly advised of the hours that the cemetery is accessible as well as the regulations for decoration. This latter item contributes to the time scheduling for publication and considerably reduces phone inquiries in this regard.

Mount Kelly Cemetery is located in a residential area, two miles from all other parish property. Vandalism has been a problem in the history of the cemetery. Families who reside adjacent to the cemetery are also included on the mailing list for the newsletter. Many of these are people of other religions, but people nonetheless who have a deep interest in the cemetery as they view it daily. Because we encourage their interest by including them in the mailings, their interest has been heightened and many have "adopted" the cemetery property as their own and have become quite protective of it. We have found vandalism significantly reduced during the past year as a helpful by-product of stimulating this neighborhood interest.

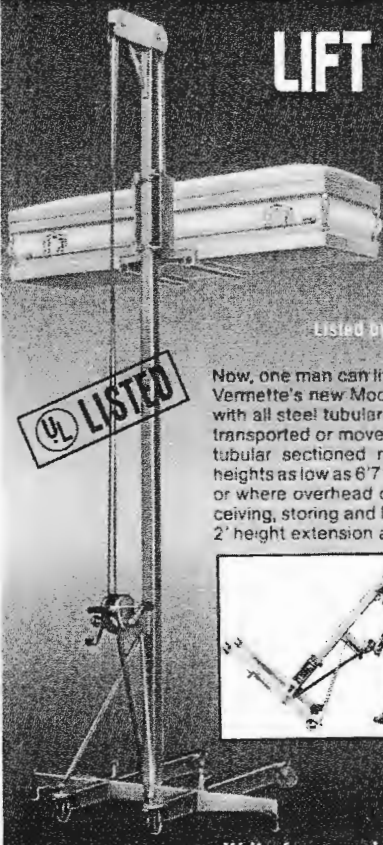
As a parish cemetery of less than four acres, we have only 25 to 30 burials a year. Those who have been interred during the interval between publications are listed in the subsequent issue with a

reminder to remember these deceased in personal and parish community prayer. At the same time, each year the parish celebrates a Memorial Day Service in the cemetery and all are invited through the newsletter to attend this ceremony.

In the most recent issue, an article entitled "Bereavement Resource" appeared in which a new service called Bereavement Counseling was offered at the cemetery. As a two-person operation, one part-time salesperson and one part-time superintendent/maintenance person, I added this function to the services I already perform and have performed at Mount Kelly over the past seven years. Through my experience as an associate pastor at Sacred Heart, I established a counseling relationship to many families experiencing grief-bereavement in their lives. Many of these people interred loved ones at Mount Kelly. Now no longer actively associated with priestly ministry, I continue and encourage this counseling relationship through the newsletter,

where I have expressed an availability to people who may just want to stop and talk for a moment while visiting the cemetery. People now know that I am present in the cemetery two days a week performing maintenance functions and that I am available and do not mind being stopped at any time. For the past several years through these listening experiences, I have discovered that the potential for grief resolution is quite high in this setting. Because I am now known in the parish as well as the cemetery, people are becoming more and more accustomed to seeking me out on the cemetery grounds on these two days while I am away from my full-time position as Director of Religious Education at Saint James Parish, Ferndale, Michigan.

**Editor's Note:** Sample newsletters as well as additional information regarding the historical research project or bereavement counseling are available by contacting Joseph B. Sankovich, Superintendent, Mount Kelly Cemetery, 22430 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, Michigan 48124.



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