

Associated Catholic Cemeteries of Seattle

by Joseph B. Sankovich

(Editor's Note: NCCC members are encouraged to prepare an article on their cemetery operation. Items that you will want to include are a brief background on the establishment of the cemetery system, number of cemeteries in your operation, management, maintenance, products and services, and finances. Several photos of the cemeteries would be most appropriate. The following is an example of such an article. NCCC looks forward to receiving information on your cemetery operation.)

Background

Associated Catholic Cemeteries is the umbrella organization that combines the three Archdiocesan cemeteries serving metropolitan Seattle. While Associated Catholic Cemeteries was formally organized with the opening of the second of the Archdiocesan cemeteries in 1954, the history of Catholic burial in the Archdiocese goes back many more years. The first Catholic burial of record in the Northwest Territory was one Salvador Antonio, a burial at sea in the year 1774. It was in Ft. Vancouver near what is now the Washington/Oregon state border that a formal Catholic cemetery was first organized. Catholic burial was important enough to the trappers coming from Quebec that they, even prior to the establishment of the first missionary parishes in the Northwest Territory, took it upon themselves to

organize a Catholic burial ground.

Today, the Archdiocese of Seattle consists of 19 counties in western Washington covering 24,824 square miles with a Catholic population of 309,420, representing 9% of the general population. Three Catholic cemeteries, owned and operated by the Archdiocese, serve the metropolitan Seattle area. One private Catholic cemetery serves the majority of the population of Tacoma, the second largest metropolitan area in the Archdiocese. Some 35 parish cemeteries scattered from the Canadian to the Oregon borders serve the balance of the Catholic population in the Archdiocese, which also reaches from the peaks of the Cascade mountains in the East to the shores of the Pacific Ocean in the West.

The Pacific Northwest has especially felt the impact of Vatican II's relaxation of the mandate for burial in Catholic cemeteries. Since 1965,

the percentage of Catholic families utilizing Catholic cemeteries has declined by 20%. The cultural environment of the Pacific Northwest also mitigates against a strong commitment to our Catholic burial tradition. Less than 1/4 of the population is affiliated with any denomination, and only 11% identifies itself as Catholic.

Mission

Within this environment, we can see how important the pre-need program is for the Associated Catholic Cemeteries. The three Archdiocesan cemeteries and one privately owned Catholic cemetery compete against 24 non-sectarian cemeteries, 12 of which have pre-need sales programs that are rather aggressive in character, seeking as much Catholic business as they can secure. Twelve of them have funeral homes on site or are owned in combination.

In 1985, the pre-need program, begun in 1971, was completely revamped.



Archbishop Raymond J. Hunthausen joined Joseph B. Sankovich at Calvary Cemetery Holy Thursday when the graves of all priests

who have served in the Archdiocese are decorated by the Associated Catholic Cemeteries.

This was done, in part, to respond to the pressure of non-sectarian cemeteries, but also because of the opportunities offered by a pre-need program for explanation of the Catholic burial tradition. In tandem with the promulgation of a Mission Statement, the pre-need program focuses on catechesis and evangelization as the rationale for a parish-based home visitation program. In a five-year rotation, pastors are asked to supply computerized lists of the parishioners, to utilize a series of pulpit announcements and bulletin stuffers and to authorize mailings and personal visits to their parishioners. To supplement this program, in 1988 the Family Service Program was established

This program offers burial follow-up home visitation to members of the immediate family of individuals recently buried in one of the Archdiocesan cemeteries. It is designed to review the services, rules and regulations, burial locations, to determine that the services provided by Associated Catholic Cemeteries met the needs of the individual family, to ascertain what other services might be necessary, and to put that family back in touch with its parish for grief and bereavement support.

Along with, and in support of, the re-orientation of our pre-need services, we focused attention on the larger question: "What purpose does Catholic burial in Catholic cemeteries serve in the post-Vatican II Church in Western Washington?" A committee appointed by Archbishop Hunthausen addressed the issue of Catholic cemeteries and after a two-year study produced a Mission Statement for the Associated Catholic Cemeteries that focuses on three areas: paraclesis, catechesis and evangelization. Quoting from the Mission Statement:

In the future we will ensure that what we promote in the Catholic Cemeteries is always ministerial in character. Our primary focus continues

to be paraclesis (comforting); in this context the Catholic cemetery will be known as a place of prayer and liturgical celebration. Our efforts in pre-need will be directed toward evangelization (the invitation to deal with death in the context of faith) and catechesis (explanation of Catholic belief and practice surrounding the reality of death). It is the purpose of the staff of the Catholic cemetery to image the Risen Christ who comforts and supports those who are bereaved, offering hope within the context of our Catholic tradition.



Calvary Cemetery is abundantly graced with traditional upright memorialization and many flowering trees and bushes.

We will take steps to make our Associated Catholic Cemeteries places where it is easy to see the distinct Catholic theology of life and death. Unlike much of our contemporary society, we will not attempt to hide the hard reality of death with our cemeteries, for death is not easy. We will make our cemeteries places to remember, to heal, to build up, to promote and to pray. Thus will our cemeteries continue to give perspective and meaning to life, death and life after death.

We undertake the entire operation of Associated Catholic Cemeteries - personnel, structure, planning and

funding - with this mission in mind.

Individual Cemeteries

The three cemeteries that comprise the Associated Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese are Calvary, Holyhood and Gethsemane. Calvary Cemetery, established in 1891 is the oldest of the three cemeteries, 40 acres in size, completely developed with one mausoleum that does also have niches. To date, 38,258 burials, entombments and inurnments have taken place in this cemetery.

Holyhood, serving the northern metropolitan Seattle area, was established in 1954. Thirty-five of its 80 acres have been developed; the first burial took place in 1954. A total of 25,000 ground spaces have been developed in this cemetery. There are two mausolea, one a chapel facility and one a garden crypt facility, with a total of 2,134 spaces. To date, a total of 20,129 burials, entombments and inurnments have taken place.

Gethsemane, established in 1975, has 69 acres with only 4 acres developed. The first burial took place in 1975, and to date 2,506 ground spaces have been developed. A garden crypt facility with 633 spaces has been built and 96 niche spaces have been provided. To date a total of 827 burials, entombments and inurnments have taken place.

Management

Responsibility for overall management of Associated Catholic Cemeteries lies with the Director's office which reports to the Director of Administration of the Archdiocese. Integrating the management of ACC into the structure of central Archdiocesan agencies helps to ensure that cemetery programs and goals are guided by and reflect the goals and priorities of the Archdiocese as a whole.

A single Counseling group serves the pre-need counseling efforts of all

three cemeteries; the cemetery staffs themselves, including administrators, office and grounds crews round out the personnel structure. In our personnel system, a Management Group collaborates to operate the cemeteries, using a Management-by-Objective model. (See Table 1). There are five people in this group: the Director, the Accounting/Human Resources Manager, two Superintendents and the Counseling Group Manager. In the office groups, there are three Office Managers, two Office Assistants, a Chaplain, one Accounting Assistant in the Director's office and a Data Base Opera-

offer single and double depth graves with the option of flush bronze or granite markers. We offer the option of monument lots and, in two of our cemeteries, pre-installed lawn crypts. We have separate sections for cremation ground burial as well as ground burial in individual full graves at the head of lots and we do provide an infant section and various sections reserved for clergy and religious women. In the above-ground area we offer both garden and chapel mausoleums with crypt configurations of single, tandem, the single with westminster, the double with westminster, couch crypts, side by

of the Archdiocese in a chaplain's role. This individual has responsibility for some grief and bereavement work, Committal Services, performing some of the liaison work with pastors, providing monthly Masses at two of the three cemeteries and assisting in the preparation and celebration of the Memorial Day Masses at all three cemeteries and All Souls Day Masses at two of the three cemeteries.

Finance

There are four funds for the operation of the cemeteries: an Endowment Fund, a Liability Fund for pre-need goods and services that are sold in advance but not yet delivered, a Capital Development Fund and an Operations Fund. Obviously because of our Pre-need Program there is the need to provide financing terms. Financing is available with no interest on pre-need purchases with up to four years to pay a completed contract. In the at-need situation, financing is also available, with terms up to one year, and again no interest charges.

Maintenance

The philosophy underlying maintenance services of the cemeteries is directly communicated to the families who have buried loved ones. It is the commitment of the cemetery system of the Archdiocese to make burial facilities available at a cost less than the prevailing rates in the area while meeting its commitment to pay comparable wages and salaries to those who work in the Church's system. At the same time, the Church seeks to make no distinction in the burial of rich or poor and therefore accepts anyone entitled to Catholic burial without regard to funds available.

In this context, then, among the services that are provided would be the cutting of grass, trimming of monuments and markers, an automatic irrigation system, placement of flow-

tor for the two largest cemeteries. The grounds crews are union and they are structured with a Working Foreman and general service groundspersons. In the Counseling Group we have off-site counsellors, the majority of whom function in the pre-need area and operate the Parish-based Home Visitation Program. Job descriptions, salary scales, job grades and a benefits handbook are some of the things that have recently been put in place to serve the personnel needs of our cemeteries.

Products/Services

Our cemeteries are full service cemeteries: for ground burial we

As a consequence, ACC commissioned banners for each of the cemeteries to focus a more hope and joy-filled celebration at graveside.

side single crypts with double shutters. For above-ground cremation we offer both marble and glass-faced niches. Ancillary products that are offered are a complete line of burial vaults and liners, bronze and granite memorials, granite monuments, cremation urns, vaults and vases.

Given the geography of the area the cemeteries serve, an area that is approximately 50 miles in length and 20 miles in width, many times it is impossible for clergy to accompany families and the deceased to the cemetery to perform Committal Services. Currently we are experimenting with one priest assigned to the Associated Catholic Cemeteries



The Mission Statement commits us to the encouragement and provision for full celebration of all the Church's rites surrounding death and funeral.

ers when individuals are not in the area and able to place those flowers on significant days in the lives of individuals buried in the cemetery. It is explained that visitation to the cemetery and prayer for the dead are among the worthwhile Catholic cemetery traditions. We encourage people to take the steps for grief resolution and growth of faith that are possible for doing that kind of visiting in the cemetery, and also to take a hand, a small hand, in the maintenance of the facility. We do not promise to maintain an impeccable and manicured facility for the benefit of our Catholic families. In order to do the charity burial work that we do, it is necessary for us to involve the Catholic faithful in the maintenance of our cemetery facilities.

Summary

Over the past five years, one very tangible measure of accomplishment at our cemeteries is the increase of 145% in dollar volume of sales. Table II shows clearly that the impetus has shifted from at-need office sales to a much greater reliance on the pre-need counseling program. Table III illustrates the impact of the age of each cemetery on the distribution of sales revenue.

These tangible factors reflect a less tangible but very significant shift of Associated Catholic Cemeteries toward a more intentional "positioning" as an extension of the mission and ministry of the Church. The redesign of the pre-need program was motivated as much by the opportunities it offers for teaching and evangelization as financial considerations. Similarly, integrating central cemetery management more closely into the overall Chancery structure reminds cemetery personnel, as well as other programs and administrative personnel, that Catholic cemeteries play an important role in service to the People of God.

Associated Catholic Cemeteries for the Archdiocese of Seattle is seeking to re-discover its roots in the Catholic burial tradition and to orient personnel, programs and services toward an explanation of this tradition's importance in the post-Vatican II Church. The answer to the question, "Why Catholic cemeter-

ies," lies both in an understanding of our tradition as well as our identity and experience as Catholic people today. Associated Catholic Cemeteries engages in the mission and ministry of the Church insofar as it becomes one place where the faithful can hear and believe the promise of Resurrection and everlasting life.

Table I

Associated Catholic Cemeteries Goals, 1989-1990

Management

To develop and implement an effective management structure which includes a comprehensive long and short range Management-by-Objectives system for Associated Catholic Cemeteries in order to assure the stability and growth of the Catholic cemetery ministry and its integration into the life of the Church of Western Washington.

Cemetery Operations

To provide facilities that are well-maintained, efficiently operated, financially sound, yet accessible to members and their families without regard to personal resources, creating a distinctly Catholic atmosphere that proclaims our faith in resurrection, contributes to spiritual healing, and serves as a means of evangelization.

Marketing

To develop, implement and maintain a catechetically-oriented marketing approach which effectively communicates to the full spectrum of our Faith community the history, place and purpose of Catholic cemeteries, the faith-growth opportunity in burial decision-making, in order to assist in the deepening of our Tradition's belief in life after death, support parish-based efforts toward evangelization and grief resolution, thus proclaiming Resurrection Faith.

Property Development

To maintain an inventory of existing products and to develop new products and services for introduction in Associated Catholic Cemeteries with a prioritization for their implementation which reflects Archdiocesan stewardship values and assists the communication of Catholic Tradition with its focus on death as the gateway to the Kingdom.

Personnel Issues

To collaboratively develop and implement comprehensive personnel policy, procedures and compensation systems for the Associated Catholic Cemeteries that reflect the Archdiocesan commitment to responsible stewardship, development of human resources and promote long-term personnel investment in this ministry.

Accounting and Finance

To develop and implement overall accounting policies and procedures that assure responsible stewardship of fiscal resources in the context of both religious and secular environments.

Parish Cemeteries

To begin, based on the Archdiocesan mandate, an analysis of policy issues, problem situations and procedural needs of the variety of parish and other Catholic cemeteries in Western Washington utilizing ACC cemetery expertise for effective continuation of this ministry in the Archdiocese.

Table II

Distribution of all Associated Catholic
Cemeteries Sales by Source
Fiscal Years 1985 and 1988

	1985	1988	Change
Pre-Need Office	14.6	11.3	- 3.3
At-Need Office	47.4	30.6	-16.8
Post-Need Office	9.6	6.3	- 3.3
Pre-Need Counselor	28.3	51.5	+23.2
Post-Need Counselor	-0-	.4	+ .4
All Pre-Need	42.9	62.7	+19.8
All At-Need	47.4	30.6	-16.8
All Post-Need	9.6	6.7	- 2.9
All Office	71.7	48.2	-23.5
All Counselors	28.3	51.8	+23.5

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Table III

Individual Cemetery Distribution of Sales by Source

	Calvary			Holyrood			Gethsemane		
	1985	1988	% Change	1985	1988	% Change	1985	1988	%Change
Pre-Need Office	16.9	18.5	1.6	13.3	11.9	- 1.4	14.8	4.5	-10.3
At-Need Office	57.0	48.8	- 8.2	45.4	14.8	-10.6	21.4	8.1	-13.3
Post-Need Office	10.6	11.3	.7	9.7	6.2	- 3.5	4.7	2.5	- 2.2
Pre-Need Counselor	15.3	20.1	4.8	31.5	46.7	15.2	59.0	84.7	25.7
Post-Need Counselor	-0-	1.0	1.0	-0-	.3	.3	-0-	.1	.1
All Pre-Need	32.2	38.7	6.5	44.8	58.6	13.8	73.9	89.3	15.4
All At-Need	57.0	48.8	-8.2	45.4	34.6	-19.6	21.4	8.1	-13.3
All Post-Need	10.6	12.3	1.7	9.7	6.5	- 3.2	4.7	2.6	- 2.1
All Office	84.6	-78.8	- 5.8	68.4	52.9	-15.5	40.9	15.2	-25.7
All Counselor	15.3	21.1	5.8	31.5	47.0	15.5	59.1	84.8	25.7
All Sales	33.0	19.6	-13.4	59.0	54.2	- 4.8	7.8	26.1	18.3

Joseph B. Sankovich is the Director of Cemeteries for the Archdiocese of Seattle, and Chairman of the Smaller Cemetery Committee.