

**Saint John Orthodox Cathedral Cemetery Guidelines**  
**Updated Draft - February 2026**

**1. Purpose of the Cathedral Cemetery**

Saint John the Evangelist Orthodox Cathedral Cemetery is intended primarily for the burial of Orthodox Christians who are members of the Cathedral and who depart this life in communion with the Church.

**2. Exceptions to This Primary Purpose**

Since the Cathedral Cemetery has limited space we do not generally allow for the burial of those outside this primary purpose; however, exceptions may be made in some circumstances for those who have close ties to the Cathedral community, if approved by the Pastor in consultation with the Parish Council. See appendix for what “close ties” could include.

**3. Regarding Suicide and Cremation**

It should also be noted that the Orthodox Church has typically denied burial in a Church cemetery to those who commit suicide. An exception to this can be made by the Pastor in consultation with the Bishop in cases where great suffering or mental illness has led someone to such an end. It should also be noted that the Orthodox Church generally disapproves of cremation out of respect for the human body, and therefore does not allow cremated remains to be buried in a Church cemetery. Any exception to this will be determined by the Pastor in consultation with the Bishop.

**4. Administration and Appeal**

- a. The Pastor and Parish Council of Saint John Orthodox Cathedral, through the Funeral and Cemetery Committee, shall administer these guidelines. Special cases may arise in which it may not be practical to follow the guidelines for good reason. Exceptions to these guidelines may be made by appeal to the Pastor and the Parish Council. All appeals should be in written form and submitted to the pastor for review.
- b. The parish reserves the rights to adopt new guidelines as it sees fit, and amend, alter, or change existing guidelines when it becomes necessary.
- c. The parish reserves the right to enlarge, reduce, re-plot, change, expand, pave, alter, install lines, install walkways, and plant or remove trees or shrubs for its own purposes.

- d. The parish reserves unto itself and those lawfully entitled, a perpetual right of ingress and egress over the lots for the purpose of passage to and from other lots, walks and streets.

## **5. Interment and Disinterment Procedures**

- a. Lots in the cemetery shall be used for no other purpose than the burial of the human dead.
- b. In accordance with local laws it is prohibited to permit the final disposition of a dead human body unless it is accompanied by a duly executed burial transit permit which will be retained in the permanent records of this cemetery. (Cremated remains are exempt from this rule as final disposition is at the crematory).
- c. Arrangements for the interment of remains in the cemetery is the responsibility of the family with procedures approved by the pastor through the Funeral and Cemetery Committee.
- d. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Funeral and Cemetery Committee to see that a record of all human remains within the cemetery is kept permanently in the parish files.
- e. No more than one body of adult size, two infants, or two cremations shall be interred in a single plot.
- f. In accordance with local laws no disinterment shall occur without prior receipt by the cemetery administration of a duly executed court order for such disinterment, issued in the District Court of the State of Alaska.
- g. Any disinterment is the sole responsibility of the family and must be supervised by personnel as required by law. In addition, the parish shall not be responsible for any casket damage.

## **6. Fees and Expenses**

- a. Family members of the deceased are responsible for all burial expenses, including funeral home services, a casket, the opening and closing of the grave, and memorial markers as described in these guidelines. In the absence of surviving family and friends an appeal may be made to the Pastor for assistance.
- b. Prayer services and a mercy meal are provided by the church community out of Christian love ~~and free of charge.~~
- c. There are no fees for burial plots in the cemetery, but a donation of \$500 to the general upkeep of the cemetery is ~~suggested~~ requested and may be made to the Cathedral fund held for this purpose

## 7. Graveside Decorations

- a. Temporary boxes, fences, or other decorations are allowed on the burial site until the site is seeded for grass.
- b. Permanent raised obstructions (including mounds and fences) shall not be allowed.
- c. New trees, plants, or shrubs may be planted at the burial site only with the permission of the Funeral and Cemetery Committee.
- d. Placing potted fresh plants and flowers, wreaths, or baskets on graves is permitted at any time. The same may be removed in 14 days unless cared for by relatives. The use of glass containers is ~~prohibited~~ discouraged for safety reasons.
- e. The cemetery reserves the right to remove any flowers and other decorations when they become unsightly and no longer serve the purpose of decorating.
- f. In order to promote the natural beauty of the cemetery setting, artificial flowers are ~~not to be used~~ discouraged for decorating ~~burial sites or markers~~ from spring through fall, that is, from May 8 (Commemoration of the Miracle at the Graveside of St. John the Evangelist) to September 26 (St. Johns' Day).

## 8. Memorialization and Markers

- a. A wood cross is an acceptable temporary marker and will be allowed to remain until a permanent marker is installed.
- b. All graves shall have a permanent marker installed within two years after the burial. This marker shall be paid for and installed by the family of the departed according to the guidelines established by the Funeral and Cemetery Committee.
- c. The permanent marker shall be a Cross fashioned from stone, concrete, metal or wood and shall be of a style appropriate to an Orthodox Christian cemetery. The cross shall be placed securely in the ground or it may sit on an appropriate and secure base no taller than 12". The total height of the marker shall be a minimum of two feet and a maximum of five feet.
- d. Any Cross constructed of wood will also require the additional placement of a permanent stone marker, approximately 12" x 12", in front of the Cross, flush with the ground, and bearing the first and last name of the deceased, along with date of birth and date of death.
- e. All markers shall have a minimum inscription of first and last name along with the full date of birth and full date of death (month, day, year) in order to properly remember the departed according to Orthodox customs.
- f. Additional inscriptions and artwork are optional, but must be in good taste and not conflict with Orthodox Christian tradition. Any questions about

appropriateness should be addressed to the Pastor and the Funeral and Cemetery Committee.

- g. It will be the responsibility of the family to repair or replace any markers that are damaged or have become unsightly. Such repairs may be requested by the Funeral and Cemetery Committee and must be made as soon as practical and no later than a year after the request is made.
- h. St. John's Cathedral Cemetery will not be liable for damaged markers or memorials. Lawn care and maintenance will be done with due care to protect the grounds, but occasional damage to graves may be unavoidable.
- i. No marker shall be installed that does not meet these guidelines. ~~is not approved by the parish.~~

## **9. General Instructions**

- a. No person shall alter a cemetery lot without the approval of the Funeral and Cemetery Committee.
- b. No motorized vehicle of any kind shall be driven in the cemetery in a disrespectful manner.
- c. Dogs and other pets shall be allowed to travel through the cemetery, but should not be allowed to stop and do anything that could be considered disrespectful to a grave.
- d. All visitors to the cemetery must conduct themselves in a respectful and appropriate manner.

## Appendix

Exceptions to be considered could include:

1. An enrolled catechumen, although not yet fully “in communion with the Church,” is still under the umbrella of the Church and may be buried in the cemetery.
2. An Orthodox Christian from another parish who has maintained a close relationship to our Cathedral community and has requested to be buried in the Cathedral cemetery could be considered for burial in the cemetery.
3. A former member of the parish who has “lapsed,” that is, who has not for some time participated regularly in the sacramental life of the Church, but has nevertheless maintained a close relationship to our Cathedral community and has not rejected the Christian faith, could be considered for burial in the cemetery.
4. An infant or young child whose parents request burial and are not members of our Cathedral community ~~or even Christian~~ could be considered for burial in the cemetery since we are told by the Lord “not to hinder the little children, for of such is the Kingdom.” However, this would not automatically extend to provide burial sites in the future to the parents or other family members.

The above examples may give reason to consider an exception to the primary purpose of the cemetery and allow for a burial, but they also may not. Final approval for any exceptions rests with the Pastor of the Church.