

DIOCESE OF KOOTENAY

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BURIAL OF THE DEAD

There is a large and varied deposit of folk lore about funeral customs. If anyone mentions the word funeral in a group of people everyone has a story to tell or an argument to promote. In days that many of our people still remember, funerals were conducted from the Church and burials were in the Church yard. But times have changed. Funerals now are often private services with only a few friends and acquaintances present. The move is towards getting the whole thing over as quickly as possible.

One does not wish to quarrel with funeral chapels or with the memorial society. Some are trying to provide a simple and dignified service at a reasonable cost. I do have great difficulty with the practice of holding the so-called memorial service after the body has been disposed of. This is quite wrong theologically and psychologically. The body is not garbage, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit of God and must be treated with respect and reverence. It is our Christian duty to bury the dead and commend the departed to God's keeping.

I know we have always had memorial services for those lost at sea or in other special circumstances, but the general Christian practice is to have a funeral service followed by the solemn committal of the body either to burial or cremation. In the latter case the ashes should be decently buried in the earth or in the sea. All that we have learned about grief has shown us that it is important for the bereaved to realize that the departed person is really dead and gone. There has to be a parting and a realization that the chapter has come to an end. You will have helped in this way many times in your visits to and prayers with bereaved families. When the so-called memorial service is held without either body or ashes or burial there is often no way for the family to make their farewell, and grief becomes generalized and very difficult to resolve. So please encourage your people to make sensible arrangements about funeral and have nothing to do with empty memorial services.

Please do talk with representatives of the Memorial Societies and undertakers, to see if we can develop a sense of co-operation and a deeper understanding on their part of what we understand Christian death and burial to be. Hopefully we can be mutually supportive. Let us remember ourselves and let us remind them that the service we are authorized and licensed to preside at is entitled "Burial of the Dead".