



NEWS

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U.S. Bishops' Doctrine Committee Issues Statement on the Proper Disposition of Bodily Remains

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Doctrine has issued a statement providing principles for evaluating some newer methods and technologies for disposition of the bodies of the deceased. The USCCB's Administrative Committee approved the issuance of the statement on March 15.

In their statement, the doctrine committee affirms that every human being has been created in the image of God and has an inherent dignity and worth. Furthermore, since "every man and woman is a unity of body and soul, respect for the person necessarily includes respect for the body." The Church considers burial to be "the most appropriate way of manifesting reverence for the body of the deceased," as it "clearly expresses our faith and hope in the resurrection of the body." While the Church permits cremation unless it is chosen for reasons contrary to the Catholic faith, the preferred method is burial.

Applying the basic principles found in the Instruction regarding Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation (*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*) issued by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2016, the committee evaluates the two most prominent newer methods for disposition of bodily remains that are proposed as alternatives to burial and cremation -- alkaline hydrolysis and human composting -- and concludes that they fail to satisfy the Church's requirements for proper respect for the bodies of the dead. After the alkaline hydrolysis process, there are about 100 gallons of liquid into which the greater part of the body has been dissolved and this liquid is treated as wastewater. At the end of the human composting process, the body has completely decomposed along with accompanying plant matter to yield a single mass of compost, with nothing distinguishably left of the body to be laid to rest in a sacred place.

The doctrine committee concludes their statement by recalling that the Catholic faith teaches us that our ultimate destiny as human beings includes our bodiliness: "We are therefore obliged to respect our bodily existence throughout our lives and to respect the bodies of the deceased when their earthly lives have come to an end. The way that we treat the bodies of our beloved dead must always bear witness to our faith in and our hope for what God has promised us."

The committee's full statement may be read here: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/On Proper Disposition 2023-03-20.pdf>.

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Please let me know if you have any questions.