
New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

Statement from NZ Catholic Bishops regarding the guidelines for burial and conservation of ashes in the case of cremation

The loss of a loved one is a significant time for every family. It is a time when we rightly give thanks for the life of our loved ones but it is also the time for us to look forward. This is why our Catholic celebration of the funeral liturgies leads people into the death and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery that most illuminates the Christian meaning of death.

In recent days the Church has reminded us that our Catholic practice is to treat a person's ashes as we would the body, that is, with care and reverence.

For this reason, when cremation of the body is chosen, we are asked that the ashes of our loved one are laid to rest in wahi tapu, a sacred place, such as at a cemetery, or a columbarium, church or surrounding area that has been blessed and set aside for this purpose. There is a beautiful prayer that is prayed when we bless a grave or place for internment of ashes.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
by your own three days in the tomb,
you made holy the graves of all who believe in you
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection even as it claims our mortal body.*

*Grant that, as we lay our loved one's mortal remains here
they may sleep in your peace
until you awaken them to glory,
for you are the resurrection and the life.
Then they will see you face to face
and in your light will see light
and know the splendour of God,
for you live and reign forever and ever.*

The place of rest then becomes a wonderful sign of the promise the risen Lord makes to us of being reunited with our loved one and with Jesus in glory. The place of rest also ensures an appropriate and sacred place for pilgrimage for loved ones and future generations to visit and pay respect to their forebears and tipuna, knowing with certainty that this is the place of rest for their earthly remains as they await the great day of resurrection.

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