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Sky-High Real Estate Prices Leading to Increased Cremation Rates

Scattering ashes popularity can leave empty memories of loved ones: cemeteries director

VANCOUVER (Oct. 2, 2014) – The high cost of living – and dying – in the Lower Mainland has cremation rates soaring and the scattering of ashes becoming more popular, says a Lower Mainland cemetery director who is concerned that people may later regret burial decisions made on economic terms.

High land values are driving families to do things they never thought they would, says Peter Nobes, Director of Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, which operates Catholic cemeteries in Surrey, New Westminster, Chilliwack and Hope.

“They are living in places they never imagined—forced to choose between tiny apartments or a monstrous commute. And now those high living costs are having an impact on what happens when we die.”

Nobes said it only makes economic sense that as land values go up, the price of a burial plot also rises, making the cheaper cremation option more appealing.

He is concerned, however, that people are making burial decisions based on mainly economic terms and popular trends, which could leave them with an empty memory of a loved one.

Nobes said the growing popularity of scattering ashes in a public place can leave loved ones feeling empty when there is no memorialization of the deceased.

“I worry that people of all faiths, and in particular Catholics, are making decisions that will have profound spiritual implications, without fully contemplating the impact.”

The Catholic Church allows cremation, but the ashes must be buried. The practice of scattering, where ashes are spread in a chosen area, is against church teaching out of reverence for the body.

He recommends four steps to ensure dignified memorial of loved ones:

1. **Have a plan.** The best way to ensure that you or a loved one is memorialized in keeping with the teachings of your faith is to have a burial plan. These are not decisions to be made during grieving. Most cemeteries offer many options. Cremated remains, for example, can be buried in the ground, in a niche wall or in a columbarium.
2. **Understand the consequences.** Scattering is not some obscure “Catholic” issue. It is an issue of importance for many religions. It is also an issue for the public in terms of having public grounds becoming graveyards and whether that is a desirable land-use practice.



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3. **Consider the memory.** What is it that represents the body after ashes have been strewn? Nobes urges a careful consideration of the person's memorialization: The bottom line for the Church is that cremains, though in ash form, are still what remains of the body. "And we should no more scatter them than we would scatter body parts about." Instead, they should be interred on sacred ground with an appropriate memorial.
4. **Pick the right service provider.** Not every provider is versed in the teachings of every faith—make sure they know yours. This is a long-term commitment, so look for a business that is invested in the community – one that you know will still be around when your great-grandchildren want to come and offer a prayer.

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