

# NATURAL BURIALS AND THE LORETTO NATURE PRESERVE CEMETERY: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

*The Loretto Motherhouse offers natural burials in two locations – in our historic cemetery and in a 3 – acre plot of woodlands designated as the Nature Preserve Cemetery. Natural or “green” burial is a burial option in which all aspects of burial remain as natural as possible by using renewable resources with minimal impact to the environment. This includes the use of non-formaldehyde-based products, natural fiber or wooden caskets (or no casket), cotton or linen materials, and no vault.*

## **What should I expect at the service?**

Natural burial funeral services are similar to a traditional funeral service and will be planned according to the wishes of the deceased.

## **What should I expect at the cemetery?**

An individual from the Loretto Community will act as a guide during the burial, explaining the process and what will occur. Because the burials are in the woods, everyone needs to wear sturdy outdoor footwear and dress for the weather. All who are able will gather at the edge of the woods and proceed back to the gravesite together. If the weather allows, a golf cart can be made available if some are unable to walk. The cemetery is about 500 yards from the edge of the woods.

The Nature Preserve Cemetery does not look like a traditional cemetery with a manicured lawn and rows of headstones. Rather, the surroundings are left in as natural and unaltered a state as possible.

Graves are situated close to walking paths and are marked by flat stones.

Natural greenery is placed at the bottom of each grave. The family may assist in placing natural greenery and/or native flowers in the grave prior to the lowering of the body/cremains. After the body/cremains are lowered into the grave, family and friends may assist in covering the body with greenery and shoveling the dirt back into the grave.

## **What is the cost for a natural burial?**

The cost of Sisters of Loretto is taken care of by the community. For all other persons, including co-members, the costs are on a sliding scale.

- Interment Rights (burial plot and maintenance): \$500-\$5000
- Burial Fee: \$400-\$1000
- Cremains Interment Rights and Burial: \$200-\$500

## **Why would someone choose a natural burial over a conventional burial?**

Natural burials are a simple historical burial practice. Up until a hundred years ago, everyone was buried this way, and many are drawn to these traditional roots. Many also want to mirror in death the way

in which they lived their lives – walking gently on Earth, in harmony with nature. A natural burial demands very few natural resources throughout the entire process by not using chemicals, reducing carbon emissions, and preserving natural habitats.

### **Is embalming required for a natural burial?**

Basic cooling of the body without embalming or a formaldehyde-free embalming fluid may be used, depending on the length of time between the death and the burial, family wishes, etc. Just as with any kind of body preservation, it is necessary to bury the body within a reasonable timeline.

### **Is a casket used in a natural burial?**

A casket made of natural, renewable resources (bamboo, willow, wood) can be used, or the body can simply be wrapped in a cotton or linen shroud and be buried directly in the ground.

### **What kind of a headstone is used?**

An engraved flat, natural stone is typically used as a headstone. If appropriate to the location of the grave, we can also plant native flowers on the gravesite.

### **Are natural burials safe?**

Natural burials have proven to be as safe as conventional burials. Traditional embalming (not used in natural burials) is used for cosmetic purposes only and does not offer additional health protection. Natural burials are also conducted at a depth of 3-4 feet, rather than 5-6 feet, which places the body at the optimum depth for rapid, efficient decomposition, while still being deep enough to prevent any disturbances from animals. For more about the safety of natural burials, visit:

<http://greenburialcouncil.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/04/The-Science-Behind-Green-Burial-2.pdf>

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

*Please consider the following items and share your responses with a member of the Pastoral Care Team.*

- Is there a particular ritual, poem, or prayer you would like to share at the gravesite?
- How many people in your family will be attending the graveside burial? Is anyone *not* able to walk back into the woods to the gravesite?

You may wish to watch this 10 minute video of the burial of Mary Peter Bruce, SL.  
<https://youtu.be/8K9ucjfRWEY>