Some Pastoral Concerns about Cremation
Early Catholic Opposition to Cremation

1. The body, as the instrument through which the sacraments are received, is itself a sacramental, holy object;

2. The body as an integral part of the human person, should be disposed of in a way that honors and reverences it, and many early practices involved with disposal of dead bodies were viewed as pagan in origin or an insult to the body;

3. In imitation of Jesus's burial, the body of a Christian should be buried;

4. That it constituted a denial of the resurrection of the body.
Changes and Development

- Cremation was, in fact, never forbidden in and of itself, e.g. pestilence, famine, war;
- Middle Ages, & 18th century rationalists advocate cremation as a statement denying the resurrection and/or the afterlife, through a pro-cremation movement;
- Rules were made against cremation, which were softened in the 1960s. The 1983 Code of Canon Law reflects this more open position;
- In 1997 the Congregation for Divine Worship granted an indult to allow for "...the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, including Mass, in the presence of the cremated remains."
Some statistics for Louisiana

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<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.38%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>Cremations</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2010 Projections</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>6,346</td>
<td>42,012</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<td>21.31</td>
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There are 12 crematories in the State of Louisiana.
Some Pastoral Concerns about Cremation

- Can. 1176 §1. Deceased members of the Christian faithful must be given ecclesiastical funerals according to the norm of law.
  §2. Ecclesiastical funerals, by which the Church seeks spiritual support for the deceased, honors their bodies, and at the same time brings the solace of hope to the living, must be celebrated according to the norm of the liturgical laws.
  §3. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless, the Church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.
Presence of Cremains at the Funeral Liturgy

- There is a preference that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. It is recommended that cremation take place following the funeral rites.
- However, circumstances, particularly financial, may prevent this order of events.
- During the liturgies, the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.
- The remains may be carried in procession and/or placed on a table where the coffin would normally be with the Paschal Candle nearby.
- Photos and other mementos may be used at the vigil but are discouraged during the funeral Mass. (FDLC)
- A pall is not used.
- Holy water should be used.
Scattering of ashes

- Respectful disposition of cremated remains involves interment or entombment.
- The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix II, #417)
Jewlery, Burial at Sea

- It is also unacceptable to have cremated remains made into jewelry, dishes and the like.

- Burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea. (cf. Order of Christian Funerals, #406.4)
Ministering to the Uncatechized

- The decision to scatter ashes or to keep them at home while contrary to Church teaching and discipline does not constitute a just reason to deny funeral rites.
- To pray for the living and the dead is a spiritual work of mercy. (CCC 2447)
- To bury the dead is a corporal work of mercy (CCC 2300)
- Unless a person is under canonical penalty or public scandal would occur, members of the faithful have a right to an ecclesiastical funeral.
- Can. 1176 §1. Deceased members of the Christian faithful must be given ecclesiastical funerals according to the norm of law.
Ministering to the Uncatechized

- This right belongs to the deceased and should not be punished for the behavior of their family.
- “A case of a Catholic choosing cremation for reasons contrary to the faith is so rare... [only] as a way to manifest unbelief in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.” (CLSA Comm.)
- Nonetheless, a priest/deacon should not be present for a scattering ritual or allow it as part of the rite of committal but this should not preclude a Vigil, Mass or Funeral Liturgy.
Catechesis is key

- Relatives should be gently catechized regarding Church teaching:
  - Sacredness of the human body (CCC 2519)
  - Resurrection of the dead (CCC 648-658)
  - Exaggerated sense of privacy and individualism (CCC 2381)
  - Encouraged to bury the remains, even at a later date if necessary (CCC 2300, 2301)
Columbarium