

DIOCESE OF LICHFIELD

GUIDANCE TO THE BEREAVED: BURIALS & MEMORIALS IN CHURCHYARDS

Christ's Church welcomes with love those who have been bereaved. It extends to them Christ's promise of victory over death. It seeks to ensure that its churchyards will be fitting resting places for the mortal remains of their departed loved ones both now and in the future.

Decisions about what may be placed in a churchyard cannot be a matter of private choice. Before any memorial is placed in a churchyard written permission from the parish priest or the Chancellor is required. The Churchyard Regulations set out what can and what cannot be permitted by a parish priest. This document is only a brief summary of some of the key parts of those Regulations. Those considering a burial in a churchyard or wishing to erect a memorial should read the Churchyard Regulations (a copy of which can be obtained from the parish priest or from the Diocesan website). They are urged to discuss matters with the parish priest at an early stage and well before any arrangements have been made with a monumental mason. To allow time for proper reflection no application for a memorial can be made until six months after a burial or interment of cremated remains.

It is important to remember that the Churchyard Regulations control what a parish priest can and cannot allow. No matter how sympathetic he or she may be to a particular proposal if it is outside the Regulations it cannot be authorised by the parish priest and must be referred to the Chancellor.

The Parish Priest can permit:

- a) An upright memorial stone within the following dimensions:
 - i) Height: No more than 1220mm (4') nor less than 762mm (2'6").
 - ii) Width: No more than 915mm (3') nor less than 510mm (1'8").
 - iii) Thickness: Thickness no more than 152mm (6") nor less than 76mm (3") except for slate which may be a minimum of 40mm (1½") thick.
- b) In the case of the burial of a child a smaller memorial stone may be permitted but in such a case the stone should be no less than 610mm (2') high, 380mm (1' 3") wide and 51mm (2") thick.
- c) Stone crosses of similar dimensions to headstones and hardwood crosses may be permitted. A wooden cross is to be no more than 915mm (3') high and the transom is to be of commensurate length.
- d) A flat memorial stone without kerbs and flush with the ground may be permitted if it is of equivalent dimensions to those set out above save that a length of no more than 1830mm (6') shall be permissible for flat memorial stones.
- e) Memorials made of a stone of the colour, type, and texture used in building the church or local buildings or a stone closely similar to those in colour and texture. The Regulations list stones which are likely to be appropriate for use in a churchyard. Polished granites, marbles, or synthetic stones are not normally appropriate for use in a churchyard
- f) Inscriptions which are simple, reverent, and appropriate to a churchyard. They should commemorate accurately the life of the person who has died. They must also be consistent with orthodox Christian belief

and should not be confined solely to expressions of personal loss or sorrow. Inscriptions need not be confined to the name and the dates of the person who has died. Inscriptions reflecting the particular character of the person being commemorated are encouraged.

- g) The parish priest may permit a small plain cross or floral symbol. With the agreement of the Archdeacon he or she may also permit a single symbol which has a particular relevance to the life of the deceased (such as the symbol of a patron saint, the tool or symbol of a particular trade, occupation, hobby, or pursuit, a regimental badge, professional insignia, or the like). Symbols may express an element of humour and the tradition of symbols in the form of a rebus

or visual pun is to be encouraged.

The Parish Priest cannot permit:

- a) Anything which is not clearly authorised by the Churchyard Regulations.
- b) A memorial which includes kerbs, railings, or chippings.
- c) Any memorial or element of a memorial which involves stone, concrete, metal, glass, plaster, or plastic objects whether in the form of model people, animals, or toys or otherwise.
- d) Any object designed to make a noise when moved by the wind.
- e) An inscription which is inaccurate, inconsistent with orthodox Christian belief, over-sentimental, flippant, or irreverent.

Individually Designed Memorials

Churchyards can be enriched by memorials which are outside the norm whether their difference from the norm is in appearance, material, or design. Memorials which display individuality are encouraged and proposals for them are welcomed. They can demonstrate thought and imagination and can contribute to and enhance the appearance of a churchyard. It is particularly important in such instances that the memorial is well designed and is of the highest quality. It is for that reason that memorials outside the scope of the Regulations can only be permitted after a faculty has been granted. Those considering applying for such a memorial should consult the parish priest at an early stage. If necessary guidance can then be obtained from the Archdeacon or the Registry as to the procedure to be adopted.

Coffins

The material used for coffins must be biodegradable. As part of its stewardship of the created world the Church encourages the use of coffins made of wool, wicker, or cardboard (suitably lined).

Flowers and other Items

Artificial flowers are not permitted. By way of exception to this prohibition the placing of wreaths and poppies is permitted in the periods of and leading up to Remembrance Day, Christmas, and Easter and on the anniversaries of death or marriage. Such items are to be removed not more than one month after those occasions. No other portable or man-made items are to be left on a grave except that such items may be left in position for the period of no more than one calendar month after a funeral. They must then be removed.

A written application for a memorial must be made on the official diocesan form. No arrangements should be made with a monumental mason before permission has been given for the proposed memorial. Those considering the erection of a memorial are strongly recommended to consult the parish priest at an early stage.