



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER MEMORANDUM

To: Pastors/Administrators, Cemetery Directors, Cemetery Record Keepers, and Staff
From: David Gabert
Date: November 11, 2024
RE: Winter Management at the Cemetery

I hope all is well for you at the parish and cemetery. As I have shared with you in prior communications, grief can cause people to make unusual and sometimes dangerous decisions. Because some cemeteries that close in the winter did not have signs or chains blocking entrances, individuals have attempted to drive into the “closed” cemetery, climb over snowbanks and chains, and believe it or not, climb over relatively high fences. Cemeteries that remain open have experienced individuals driving through unplowed sections, getting stuck in the cemetery, or even knocking over memorials and causing damage to lots.

It is extremely important that we provide a safe environment for all visitors and that we do not risk an overwhelming financial burden that can arise from just one serious accident.

CEMETERIES THAT CLOSE IN THE WINTER

I strongly urge all cemeteries that close in winter months to do the following:

- 1) Close gates to all entrances including pedestrian entrances. If you cannot close a gate, or if there are no gates, please set up barriers (perhaps a conspicuous chain draped across the entrances with a “Closed” sign);
- 2) Cover or remove all signs that state the cemetery is open;
- 3) Put up signs in conspicuous locations at all entrances stating the cemetery is closed for the winter season;
- 4) Have a notice in the parish bulletin indicating the cemetery is closed;
- 5) Notify your local funeral home when the cemetery is to be closed; and
- 6) Make an announcement at the pulpit during Masses stating that the cemetery is closed in the winter.

CEMETERIES THAT REMAIN OPEN IN THE WINTER

Unfortunately, Catholic cemeteries have seen their share of liability claims from injuries and lot damage occurring during the winter months. Last year we had a few instances where monuments were pushed over by snowplows, damage was caused to lots, and individuals drove through unplowed sections. Hiring the right snow removal vendor is extremely important.

For those cemeteries that remain open in the winter, please refer to the September 2024 Diocese of Manchester Risk and Insurance Newsletter (sent via email on September 1, 2024) on guidelines for snow and ice removal. There are some helpful hints included in that issue. I encourage you to share this newsletter with cemetery staff and/or independent contractors that provide snow and ice removal. It also provides information on hiring dependable vendors and includes links to the service agreements.

As always, do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions or concerns. I do appreciate all that you do for this important ministry!