



Our Lady  
of Peace

HOSPICE & HOME HEALTH CARE

## WHAT IS A GREEN BURIAL?

*Our Lady of Peace Education Series*

People are talking about green burials with a commitment to protecting the earth and contributing to the earth's renewal. Green burials, also called natural burials, may or may not be familiar to you, but since they are an option in the Twin Cities, we would like to provide some information to help you determine if it would be right for you.

The information we're sharing here was provided by the [Green Burial Council](#) and Marilaurice Hemlock and Anne Archbold, co-founders of [Final Blessings](#). For accuracy, we've simply taken excerpts from their writings and teachings, as well as those of the Green Burial Council.

### ***What is green or natural burial?***

Green burial is a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact. According to the Green Burial Council, it aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and/or preservation of habitat. It allows full body interment into the ground in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition.

The three top defining characteristics of any natural

burial are absence of a vault, non-toxic preparation of the body, and use of containers made of organic materials. These might include a pine coffin made by a family member, or local craftsperson, a wicker, sea grass or other woven basket, a papier maché eco-pod, or any other container designed to degrade quickly in the ground. Also recommended are shrouds, carried on shrouding boards or with a removable board in a shroud pocket.

### ***Are green burials safe?***

One of the top concerns families have about green burial is health ramifications of burial without a vault. According to Dr. Michael Osterholm with the Center for Infectious Disease Policy and Research, "Once a human dies, infectious agents that would be of any concern, including those on the individual's skin or internal organs, is greatly diminished. There simply is no measurable risk of that body transmitting an infectious disease agent." The World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization agree.

Another concern is the unlikelihood of an animal digging up the grave. Prior to the 1930's, all burials were natural, and in over 20 years in every area of the

country, there has not been one sighting of an animal disturbing a natural grave.

There are no statutes or public health restrictions on natural burial in the state of MN. Each cemetery makes internal policies on whether they will offer natural burial.

### ***What is the process?***

Bodies are washed, prepared, and kept cool, and the process is safe. Even autopsy and accident victims, some with major disfigurement, have been successfully prepared for un-embalmed visitation without creating a health risk to workers or visitors.

Cemetery staff may be waiting at the entrance with a burial cart or other mode of transporting the body to the gravesite. The family may choose to assist in placing the deceased on the cart and help guide it to a chapel or graveside for the service.

Rather than indoor-outdoor carpeting, wide boards are placed around the grave edges to inhibit collapse, which are often covered in greens. The gravesite may be adorned with natural local greenery along the grave floor or covering the excavated dirt mound to soften the appearance. Although there may be a motorized lowering device used, it is as likely that there will be ropes and slats across the grave where the casket or shrouding board may rest for a ceremony before being lowered by hand.

Cemetery staff is responsible for completing the mound and clearing the area once the family has left. Over time,

the disturbed area will blend into the surrounding forest or meadow floor.

Not all green burial cemeteries are alike, and no two funerals are the same. Green burial is another option for families to consider. There are Council-certified cemeteries in the Twin Cities that are [listed on the Green Burial Council website](#). We invite you to contact them and [Final Blessings](#) directly for more information.

### ***About the Green Burial Council***

The Green Burial Council is a national organization whose mission is to inspire and advocate for environmentally sustainable, natural death care through education and certification.

### ***About Final Blessings***

Final Blessings is based in the Twin Cities. Co-founders Marilaurice Hemlock & Anne Archbold help families create a ceremony that is meaningful and reflects the wishes, beliefs, personality, and values of the person who has died, as well as those who are grieving.



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### ***We're here for you.***

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**651-789-5030**

