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# Catholic Cemeteries

Serving Northeast Kansas • Summer 2011

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with my wife Shirley and a group of 90 Catholics from local parishes.

From the executive director



It was an incredible faith journey to walk where Jesus lived and preached. We went to many of the holy places associated with the mysteries of the rosary—among them,

the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the site of Jesus' baptism at the River Jordan, Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle, and the upper room where he broke bread with his apostles.

It was interesting to learn about Jewish burial traditions of Jesus' time and to see the cemeteries where old tombs covered hillsides. We visited the tomb of John the Baptist and had Mass in Bethany where Jesus raised his good friend Lazarus from the dead.

High points of the pilgrimage for me were the two visits we made to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. On the first visit, we walked through the two rooms of the tomb commemorating where Jesus was laid to rest following his crucifixion and then rose to new life. Early another morning, we attended Mass concelebrated inside the tomb by the five priests who were making the pilgrimage with us.

From time immemorial, history traces rituals associated with death and dying and the transition to new life. As Catholics, we have the added perspective and the powerful belief in the mystery that Christ's death and resurrection gave new meaning to our lives and deaths and hold the promise of eternal life.

Our ministry at Catholic Cemeteries is rooted in this profound mystery of our faith as we help individuals plan ahead and serve them at their time of loss. We are pleased to be extending this ministry to the people of Topeka and the surrounding area as we assume management of Mt. Calvary Cemetery in that city. We look forward to serving you and to extending our mission. Thank you.

Robert W. Chenoweth

## Catholic Cemeteries assumes management of Mt. Calvary, Topeka



In an effort to provide enhanced services for parishioners of Topeka and surrounding communities, Catholic Cemeteries Association of Northeast Kansas has assumed management of Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Topeka, Kan. "We are gaining the expertise and extensive experience of Catholic Cemeteries' staff and economies of scale by becoming part of this larger operation," said Father Jerry Volz, pastoral leader, Topeka region. "At the same time, Catholic Cemeteries has an excellent reputation as a ministry with commitment to compassion, dignity and respect."

The Advisory Board of Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Topeka, unanimously supported the transition, explained Larry Krische, chairperson. Some of the benefits of this new relationship include centralized computer software for record-keeping, strong

perpetual care and a viable strategic plan for the future. Mt. Calvary, Topeka, will remain a multi-parish cemetery.

"We are pleased to welcome Mt. Calvary, Topeka, to our family of Catholic cemeteries serving northeast Kansas," said Robert W. Chenoweth, executive director.

"We have already expanded hours of the Topeka office which is now open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. We also offer 24-hour availability of our family service counselors at the time of an individual or family's personal loss."

In August, representatives from the Topeka region will be added to the Board of Trustees of Catholic Cemeteries Association of Northeast Kansas.

Mt. Calvary, Topeka, is located at 801 S.W. Westchester Rd.; telephone 785-272-0820 in the Topeka area.

*(See related article, page 3, new Topeka office coordinator.)*

### New name, new website address reflect expanded service area

Formerly known as Catholic Cemeteries of Wyandotte and Johnson Counties, our name and website address have changed to reflect our broader geographic reach.

- Our new name is **Catholic Cemeteries Association of Northeast Kansas**.
- Our new website is [www.cathcemks.org](http://www.cathcemks.org).
- To email us, use [information@cathcemks.org](mailto:information@cathcemks.org).
- In the Kansas City area, Catholic Cemeteries' telephone number remains **913-371-4040**.
- In the Topeka area, the office can be reached at **785-272-0820**.

We now manage and operate eight cemeteries. These include our newest addition, Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Topeka; Gate of Heaven, Mt. Calvary and St. John Cemeteries, Kansas City, Kan.; Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Olathe; Resurrection Cemetery, Lenexa; St. Joseph Cemetery, Shawnee; and St. John Cemetery, Lenexa.



For more information about any of our services, call Catholic Cemeteries, 913-371-4040 (Kansas City area), 785-272-0820 (Topeka area), email us at [information@cathcemks.org](mailto:information@cathcemks.org), or visit our website at [www.cathcemks.org](http://www.cathcemks.org).



**Office and more information**

913-371-4040 (Kansas City area)  
785-272-0820 (Topeka area)  
information@cathcemks.org  
www.cathcemks.org

**St. John Cemetery**  
36th and State Ave.  
Kansas City, Kan.

**Mt. Calvary Cemetery**  
38th and State Ave.  
Kansas City, Kan.

**Gate of Heaven Cemetery**  
126th and Parallel  
Kansas City, Kan.



Nine years ago this summer, Ed and Valena Wheeler lost their teenaged son Christopher to a tragic auto accident. The Wheelers have turned their sorrow to a labor of love tending a beautiful flower garden near Christopher's grave at Resurrection Cemetery.

## Tragic loss leads to labor of love

At perhaps the worst time in their lives, Ed and Valena Wheeler, Shawnee, Kan., had one of the best experiences of their lives when they encountered and worked with staff of Catholic Cemeteries.

It was summer 2002. Their son Christopher had just graduated from high school and enrolled at the University of Kansas. On July 14, he played cards late into the night with some friends. Driving home early the next morning, Christopher suffered a life-threatening head injury in a car accident. He was so close to home, his parents heard the sirens. But it wasn't until two police officers rang the doorbell at 6 a.m. that they learned their son was seriously injured. Christopher died later that morning on July 15 in the hospital.

Through St. Joseph, Shawnee, their parish, the Wheelers were introduced to Catholic Cemeteries and Anne Riley, a family service counselor at the time.

"Meeting Anne was truly a blessing from God for us," Ed recalled. "Her calm personality and compassionate demeanor gave us hope that we could go on with our lives. She saved us from falling apart mentally and emotionally."

Anne listened to how the couple planned to memorialize their son. "If she heard us wandering down a path in our thinking, she would bring us back and ask us, 'What would Chris want?'" Valena said.

The Wheelers appreciated that Anne was compassionate, calm and sympathetic. "She helped with the many decisions we had to make," Valena added.

The couple selected a corner location at Resurrection Cemetery, Lenexa, Kan., for the burial plot. They purchased four burial spaces and beautified the spot with the monument and a memorial bench to their son.

As time passed and in accord with their wishes and the blessings of Catholic Cemeteries, the Wheelers volunteered to tend and cultivate the Faith Garden near their family burial space. This has become a labor of love for Ed, in particular, who likes to work in the dirt and visit with the maintenance crew. "Working the garden is good for the soul," he said.

The Wheelers also enjoy walking through the cemetery. "It's like a big beautiful park or floral garden to us," Ed said. "We also find many other people walking there as well."

"All the staff members at Resurrection Cemetery do an incredible job," he continued. "They take the time to say hello even when they are busy. Everybody we meet is so nice and helpful. I can't tell you how heartwarming it is."

The Wheelers know they can't bring their son back, but they find comfort and peace in the sacred space for remembering that they have helped beautify at Resurrection Cemetery.



Staying true to history, Catholic Cemeteries worked with the Christopher family to replicate headstones of relatives at St. Joseph Cemetery, Shawnee.



BEFORE

## Historic headstones replicated at St. Joseph Cemetery, Shawnee

A side trip to Shawnee, Kan., in 2002, set in motion the process of historic replication of two family headstones dating to 1878 and 1880 and a sense of satisfaction for a 90-year-old father and his son in southern California.

While attending a family reunion in South Dakota, John Christopher of Winnetka, Calif., took an excursion to Kansas where his paternal great, great grandparents had lived and died. He found the gravesites of James and Ellen Christopher at St. Joseph Cemetery, Shawnee. The headstones, made of sandstone, had weathered 100 years and were in disrepair and crumbling.

On his return to California, John expressed to his son Brian Christopher, who lives in nearby West Hills, that he would like to fix or replace the headstones at the family's expense. Brian contacted Catholic Cemeteries and requested photos of the monuments to authenticate that they belonged to his father's great, great grandparents.

Working by telephone with Karen Ohde, Catholic Cemeteries' family service counselor, and Sharon Vallejo, office manager, Brian determined that the headstones were beyond restoration. Catholic Cemeteries introduced him to Kansas Granite, Ellis, Kan., where company representatives agreed to replicate the headstones in granite so they would be historically correct and would withstand rigors of weather and time.

Catholic Cemeteries facilitated one final request of the family and shipped James' original headstone to Brian in California. "Instead of having it crushed for road rubble," Brian thought he could keep the stone in the family for remembrance sake. The headstone—all 350 lbs. of it—arrived on a pallet and is enshrined in a corner of Brian's garden.

While he said it seemed strange completing the transaction entirely by phone and email, Brian acknowledged how easy it was to work with the Catholic Cemeteries' staff.

### THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY

As he interacted with Catholic Cemeteries' staff to replace the historic headstones, Brian Christopher researched the lives of James and Ellen Christopher.

From Margaret Landis' book, *The Winding Valley and The Craggy Hillside: A History of the City of Rosedale, Kansas* (1976), he learned that James was one of the early residents of Rosedale in the southeastern part of what is now Kansas City, Kan. (and that continues to be called the "Rosedale area"). John Christopher, Brian's father, recalled a story about James crossing a river in winter time in his heavy clothing, falling from the horse he was riding, and being saved by grabbing the tail of the animal and being dragged through the water to the other side.

The only account Brian could track of Ellen also involved a horse and another more tragic accident. An old newspaper article reported that while returning home from Kansas City, Mo., in a horse-drawn wagon, Ellen fell from the wagon when the horse was spooked. The wagon ran over her, causing her almost instant death. An inquiry followed, and the incident was ruled accidental.

**Mt. Calvary Cemetery**  
158th and S. Hwy. 169  
Olathe, Kan.

**Resurrection Cemetery**  
83rd and Quivira  
Lenexa, Kan.

**St. John Cemetery**  
89th and Pflumm  
Lenexa, Kan.

**St. Joseph Cemetery**  
61st and Quivira  
Shawnee, Kan.

**Mt. Calvary Cemetery**  
801 S.W. Westchester Rd.  
Topeka, Kan.

# Meet our Catholic Cemeteries' staff

## New to Catholic Cemeteries, well-acquainted with Topeka



**NANCY LACORE** brings a lifetime of experience and a diverse background to her new position as office coordinator with Catholic Cemeteries' office at Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Topeka.

She's the mother of seven, ages 18 to 31. Most recently, she operated her own business offering non-medical assistance to elderly persons. Nancy became aware of the needs of the elderly because of her work with Meals on Wheels and serving as a homebound minister at Most Pure Heart of Mary, her parish in Topeka.

It's important for her to feel called to a job or role that she fills, and Nancy has a sense of this with her new job at Mt. Calvary. She's comfortable with the realities of death and cemeteries and believes she is a perfect fit for the job. The fact that she has lived in Topeka since 1979, been active in her parish and knows many people in the Catholic community will also prove very helpful in her new position.

Nancy will staff the Topeka office, enter records into the computer, answer telephones and serve as the receptionist.

## Bilingual and eager to share Catholic Cemeteries' story

**GILBERT VALLE** sees his biggest opportunity as a Catholic Cemeteries' pre-need counselor to be one of educating people about the organization.

"I want to get the word out and tell people what Catholic Cemeteries does," he said, "and especially to clear up misconceptions that our services are expensive. What we offer is very affordable. My goal is to share information with people."

Being bilingual will be a tremendous asset, as Gilbert opens doors to the growing Spanish-speaking community in areas served by Catholic Cemeteries. He is a member of All Saints Parish, Kansas City, Kan., and considers that large congregation a good starting place for outreach.

Originally from El Paso, Texas, Gilbert moved to Kansas City in 1990 and met his wife Ofelia at his parish. The Valles have a daughter, Stephanie, who is a junior at Bishop Ward High School.

In 1994, Gilbert opened his own business—an insurance and income tax preparation company. His five-year plan is to retire. When he read that Catholic Cemeteries was recruiting part-time pre-need counselors, the position appealed to him.

"We all think we're not ready to die yet," Gilbert said. "But it's good to be prepared because eventually we're all going to be there."

Gilbert refers to the Scripture passage emphasizing that humans know neither the day nor the hour, but that Jesus will return for all of us according to God's plan. "We don't die because we are sick or old," he believes. "We pass away when the Lord wants us to come to his kingdom."

His own brush with mortality has convinced Gilbert of this important lesson. He suffered a stroke in 2000; the following year, he began dialysis that lasted for four years until he had a kidney transplant. In between times, Gilbert underwent open heart surgery.



"I'm very blessed," he said.

Now Gilbert wants to help other people understand that while it's very important to be prepared spiritually for the eventuality of death, it's also important to be prepared physically to ensure burial in sacred ground.

## Drawn to ministry

**PEGGY MILLER** is a people person. She likes working with people and knows a lot of them from her lifelong residency in Kansas City, Kan., and the various jobs she's held.



Peggy returned to Catholic Cemeteries in April 2010 to work as a pre-need counselor because she is drawn to this ministry to help people with important life decisions. From personal experience, she understands and appreciates the value of pre-planning burial arrangements.

Following her father's death, Peggy and her husband Rob made pre-arrangements when they both were in their 30s. Not too many years later, Rob developed colon cancer; he died within two years of his diagnosis. At the time, Peggy was working part-time at Catholic Cemeteries as secretary to the executive director.

She left the organization in August 2003 for a position with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas where she remains employed full-time. Peggy said she knew in her heart that she would return to Catholic Cemeteries in some capacity.

"It's a great team," she said, "and my empathy is so very much there to help people with pre-need planning."

Peggy spends as much of her free time as she can with her three children. She also enjoys reading and music and is active in St. Patrick's Parish, Kansas City, Kan., where she is a member.

## Record attendance at Memorial Day Masses

We had record attendance at our 2011 Memorial Day Masses celebrated across our Catholic cemeteries in Wyandotte and Johnson Counties. Over 500 persons attended Mass at Resurrection Cemetery, Lenexa, Kan. Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Kansas City, Kan., drew an estimated 250 persons; St. Joseph, Shawnee, 150; Mt. Calvary, Olathe, 60; and Gate of Heaven, Kansas City, Kan., 50.



**Memorial Day—Gate of Heaven**  
Flanked by two Knights of Columbus, Father John Riley, archdiocesan chancellor, processed from the altar at Gate of Heaven Cemetery following the Memorial Day Mass.



**Memorial Day—Mt. Calvary, KCK**  
Father Mark Mertes, Wyandotte County pastor, preached during the Memorial Day Mass celebrated at Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Kansas City, Kan.

## Developments at Gate of Heaven

### Catholic Cemeteries Board of Trustees

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Rita Lavery  
Jerry Mayne  
John Thomas

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Robert W. Chenoweth

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John Krumm  
Mike Kuban  
Peggy Miller  
Karen Ohde  
Charlie Owens  
Bill Riley  
Tim Streff  
Gilbert Valle  
Carla Yarnell

#### *Office support*

Debbie Clark  
Nancy Lacore  
Kelli Lawson  
Rose Shaffer  
Sharon Vallejo, manager

#### *Field operations manager*

Jerry Frederes

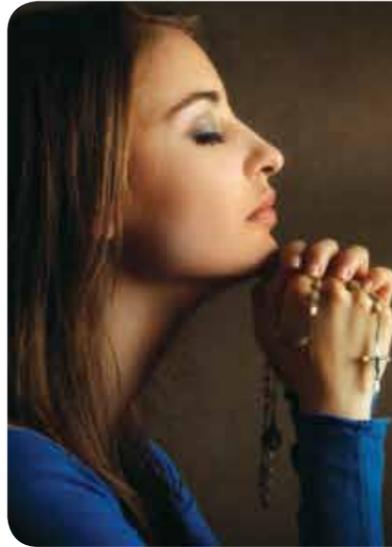
Grading is underway for the new road on the east side of Gate of Heaven Cemetery, 126th and Parallel, Kansas City, Kan., in preparation for development of the Veterans Memorial slated for this location. The next step will be pouring the foundations for the memorial and the flagpole with completion of the memorial anticipated in 2012. Lots are now available in the section surrounding the memorial for burial of veterans and their spouses.

The new monument commemorating victims of abortion is in place on the west side of the cemetery. This is a collaborative project with the William T. Fitzsimons Assembly of the Knights of Columbus. Memorial opportunities include engraved, granite bricks on the sidewalk and patio of the memorial.

Also newly located at Gate of Heaven is the Guardian Angel Shrine in the midst of the burial section for infants and children. The shrine is fabricated from fiber bronze.



The beautiful new Guardian Angel Shrine is now in place at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in western Wyandotte County.



### Burial arrangements available following a miscarriage

In collaboration with practices being encouraged in parishes through the Pro-life Office of the Archdiocese, Catholic Cemeteries is available to assist parents as they experience the unexpected loss of an infant due to a miscarriage.

In the Infant Burial Sections at Resurrection Cemetery, Lenexa, Kan., and Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Kansas City, Kan., there are special areas designated for the remains of miscarried infants. Parents who have experienced a miscarriage can secure a 12 x 12 inch burial plot in these sections with a stone marker for inscription of the infant's name or the family name and date. There is a special, nominal fee for this arrangement. We are planning to add a similar section at Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Topeka.

For more information, call 913-371-4040 or, in Topeka, 785-272-0820.

