

# **St Matthews Episcopal Church**

## **BURIAL GUIDELINES & GRAVEYARD POLICY**

### **General Statement:**

The St. Matthew's churchyard, which includes both the church grounds and the graveyard, are important to its parishioners and to the community at large. It not only serves as a final resting place for many but also has historical significance and offers space for worship, prayer, and quiet reflection. The churchyard also serves as a bird sanctuary and provides a home for a large variety of historic old trees.

The churchyard's history and ambiance are wedded to the house of worship which rests in its midst, further emphasizing the need for their proper care and preservation.

Due to the potential damage that digging full-body graves poses to the historic trees in the graveyard, some gravesites have been restricted to the burial of cremated remains (cremains) only. It is important to the health of the trees that their root systems are not disturbed under the tree canopy or drip line.

All applications for burial in the St. Matthew's graveyard require approval by the St. Matthew's Vestry except as noted below. All above-ground gravestones and memorials also require Vestry approval. The policies that guide the Vestry's decisions are outlined in this document and have been put in place to preserve the history and maintain the beauty of the churchyard.

### **BURIAL SITE APPLICATION PROCESS**

All requests for burials in the St. Matthew's graveyard require the submission of the ***Individual Burial Site Request Form***. Forms can be obtained by contacting the parish office (919-732-9308) or [welcome@stmatthewshillsoborough.org](mailto:welcome@stmatthewshillsoborough.org). Completed forms should be returned to the parish office.

For applications that require approval by the St. Matthew's Vestry, please note that the Vestry meets once each month, generally on the third Tuesday. Every effort will be made to review burial applications at the first meeting after it is submitted though this is not always possible. Applicants will receive a letter from the Clerk of the Vestry once the Vestry decides on the request. If you would like to check on the status of your application, please contact the parish office (contact information above).

Burial applications that were approved before the adoption of the latest revision of this document action remain in effect. No further application is needed, and no application fee is required.

In the interest of conserving precious space, cremation is encouraged.

## Categories of Eligible Persons

Burial applications received from **active members\***, their spouses, or minor children are automatically approved if they are requesting to have their cremated remains:

- Interred in the Memorial Garden;
- Scattered in the Scatter Garden; or
- Interred in the previously assigned gravesite of a family member if space allows (see above for limitations).

Burial applications received from the following categories of persons must obtain approval from the rector and Vestry:

1. **Active members\*** of St. Matthew's, their spouses and minor children who are requesting any type of burial in an unassigned gravesite.
2. The spouse of a person previously buried in the graveyard; and
3. Anyone whose application for burial was approved prior to the adoption of this policy (no new application is needed);

*\* Note that an **active member** is defined as one whose membership is recorded in the parish register, who takes communion three times per year and who gives regularly of time, talent, or treasure for the furthering of the mission and ministry of the parish unless they are prevented from doing so.*

Persons not falling into any of the above categories and who can demonstrate strong ties either to St. Matthew's or to relatives buried in the graveyard may petition the Vestry for special permission.

## Options for Burial

The following options for the disposition of remains are available at St. Matthew's:

1. Burial of cremated remains in the Memorial Garden
2. Scattering of cremated remains in the Scatter Garden
3. Full-body burial
4. Interment of cremated remains in a single full body gravesite.
  - a. If a body is buried in the site, up to three additional cremated remains may be interred.
  - b. If the gravesite is not used for a full-body burial, up to six cremated remains may be interred.

## Memorial Garden

The following requirements apply to the Memorial Garden:

- Only burial of cremated or aquamation remains is permitted.
- Remains must be in a biodegradable container or no container.
- No specific location of cremated remains within the Memorial Garden may be reserved for burial. Markers and mementos may not be placed to locate specific burial sites, nor are the locations of actual burial sites tracked for future reference.
- In lieu of other monuments or markers, uniform 9" x 3" bronze plaques may be installed around the Memorial Garden seat wall on which may be inscribed the name and the date of birth & death of a person buried there. See the monument section for further information about these plaques.
- Every effort will be made to accommodate requests for vertically adjacent bronze plaques on the Memorial Garden seat wall for spouses.

### **Scatter Garden**

Cremated remains may be scattered in the Scatter Garden which is along the north wall of the churchyard. There are no monuments or markers allowed in the Scatter Garden, although a bronze plaque may be placed in the Memorial Garden. (See the monument section for more information about requirements for plaques.)

### **Application Fees and Other Important Information:**

Applications for burial in the St. Matthew's graveyard must be accompanied by an application fee. The type of burial being requested determines the amount of the fee:

- Full-body burial: \$500
- Cremation:
  - \$200 for interment in the Memorial Garden, scattering of ashes in the Scatter Garden
  - \$500 for interment in an unassigned full body plot;
  - \$200 for interment in a previously assigned full body plot
  - These fees are refundable if the application is rejected.

Persons for whom this fee causes undue hardship may request a waiver by petitioning in writing to the Vestry of St. Matthews.

## **Gravesite Selection**

Upon approval of a burial application requesting a full-body plot, a member of the St. Matthew's Cemetery Committee will contact the applicant about selecting a gravesite. They will review available sites and help make an appropriate selection.

Not all full burial sites are available for full body burial. Gravesites that fall within the drip line of the trees (the tree canopy) cannot be used for full body burials. These sites are reviewed annually by the St. Matthew's Churchyard Guild in consultation with the caretaker and communicated to the Cemetery Committee. Any updates are recorded on the Churchyard Map and in the Churchyard Database.

Once a gravesite has been selected, the Cemetery Committee provides the section and plot number to the parish administrator who notes it on the Churchyard Map and records in the Churchyard Database.

## **Green Burial**

Green Burial practices are permissible but not required. Green burials do not require the use of caskets, containers, or vaults. Instead of cremation, a process known as Aquamation may be used. For more information about green burials, you may visit:

- Green Burial: [greenburialcouncil.org](http://greenburialcouncil.org)
- Aquamation: [endswellcremation.com](http://endswellcremation.com)

## **Relinquishment of a Gravesite**

If it is decided later that burial in St. Matthews graveyard is not desired, a gravesite may be relinquished by sending a written request to the parish office. The request should come from the person assigned to the gravesite or, if they are deceased, their next of kin. Any application fees paid will be refunded.

## **Opening and Closing of Gravesites**

- ***Cremated Remains*** - Customarily the parish caretaker opens and closes gravesites for the burial of cremated remains. The cost for this service is \$75.00. Alternatively, families can contract a licensed Funeral Service.
- ***Full body burials*** - The family must contract with a licensed Funeral Service to open and close the grave. Church staff or a Cemetery Committee member can assist in site identification.

## MONUMENTS AND OTHER MARKERS

Any gravesite markers that are not flush to the ground must be reviewed by the Churchyard Guild and require approval by the St. Matthew's Vestry. All such requests require the submission of the *Gravesite Marker Form*. Forms can be obtained by contacting the parish office (919-732-9308) or [welcome@stmatthewshillsoborough.org](mailto:welcome@stmatthewshillsoborough.org). Completed forms should be returned to the parish office.

The Vestry reserves the right to final approval of the size, design, location and inscriptions on any marker placed in the St. Matthew's churchyard.

Please note that the Vestry meets once each month, generally on the third Tuesday. Every effort will be made to review applications at the first meeting after it is submitted though this is not always possible. Applicants will receive a letter from the Clerk of the Vestry once the Vestry decides on the request. If you would like to check the status of your application, please contact the parish office (contact information above).

Applications that were approved before the adoption of the latest revision of this document remain in effect. No further application is needed, and no application fee is required.

### **Fees:**

Since the above ground monuments increase the cost of maintaining the grounds, a one-time maintenance fee of \$250 is required for each above-ground monument placed in the graveyard. The fee should be submitted with the application. If an application is not approved, the fee will be refunded.

### **Suggestions and Requirements**

We value the beauty and nature of our Graveyard. To minimize monument damage and to facilitate efficient maintenance of the grounds, we respectfully suggest a flat stone or bronze plaque monument not exceeding 24" wide x 30" long, placed into the ground so that the top exposed surface is flush with the surface of the grave site.

These requirements must be followed in the design of any new markers placed in the graveyard:

- To maintain consistency within the graveyard, markers must be made of white marble or gray granite. A bronze plaque may be mounted to the stone or used as a flat monument.
- The wording of any inscriptions must be respectful and consistent with Christian scripture and theology.
- No more than one above ground monument is allowed per burial site. Additional flat monuments may be placed on the gravesite for cremated remains or footstone.
- The size of above-ground monuments is not to exceed the dimensions outlined below.

## **Maximum Dimensions**

Single Burial Site maximums: (Burial plots are 48" wide x 96" long):

- Base: 38" wide x 14" deep x 6" high
- Headstone: 30" wide x 10" deep x 36" high
- Maximum Overall Height: 42"

Double Headstone centered on 2 Burial Sites: (Double plots are 96" wide x 96" long):

- Base: 65" wide x 16" deep x 6" high
- Headstone: 48" wide x 8" deep x 36" high
- Maximum Overall Height: 42"

## **Memorial Garden:**

Markers and mementos may not be placed to locate specific burial sites in the Memorial Garden, nor are the locations of actual burial sites tracked for future reference.

In lieu of other monuments or markers, uniform 9" x 3" bronze plaques may be installed around the Memorial Garden seat wall on which may be inscribed the name and the date of birth & death of a person buried there. All arrangements for the purchase, text layout, production and installation of such plaques are handled by the family, through Ron Bartholomew at Durham Marble Works (919-810-5772).

## **Scatter Garden:**

There are no monuments or markers allowed in the Scatter Garden, although a bronze plaque may be placed in the Memorial Garden. (See above for more information about requirements for plaques.)

## **MEMORIALS, PLANTINGS AND FLOWERS**

Memorial gifts to the Churchyard Maintenance Fund are always gratefully received.

Those wishing to make a memorial gift of permanent items for the churchyard (e.g., trees, bushes, benches) should consult with the Churchyard Guild for design or species and location approval. The Churchyard Guild advises the Vestry on its suitability and location. No guarantee of the viability of any planting can be given. The church retains the right to repurpose any of the churchyard and there is no guarantee that future land use may require removal or relocation of this memorial gift.

Temporary items, such as potted plants, cut flowers, flags, and other memorabilia, may be left at the gravesite, subject to approval by the Churchyard Guild. Such items must allow for normal maintenance of the grave and may be removed or relocated if they impede maintenance. It is recommended that containers for floral arrangements be retrieved within one week. Once seasonal decorations have faded, they will be removed. Artificial floral decorations are not permitted.

Policy adopted by Vestry on 4/24/2001. Revisions approved by Vestry 10/24/2006, 7/22/2014, 8/17/2021

Reviewed with Robert 7/24/23

