

True to our calling . . . We continue our efforts to preserve and nurture God's creation . . .

- Unity in Diversity #40

In keeping with this commitment, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration have provided the opportunity for our sisters to choose to be buried in an earth-friendly manner. On our property at Villa St. Joseph near La Crosse we have established a natural burial site, a green cemetery, which is for FSPA members only.

This brochure is meant to be a guide for sisters who are discerning whether this option is right for them. It may also help families to understand why a sister chose this option and how her wishes affect funeral procedures.

Several sisters have chosen to be honored in death with a natural funeral and burial. Two share their thoughts:

"The earth has nourished me all these years. It's now time to return that nourishment to the earth with my body."

"The earth is sacred, our bodies are sacred. Every time I pass by the cemetery I think 'this is where I'm going to be!' You can't get anymore sacred than that."

Additional Resources

Book: *Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love*, Lisa Carlson

Green Burial Council:
www.greenburialcouncil.org

Natural Legacies, Inc.:
www.naturallegacies.org



Cover photo by Lucy Slinger, FSPA
Additional photos courtesy of Mississippi Valley Conservancy



Franciscan Sisters
of Perpetual Adoration

Modern Lives. Sacred Traditions.

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Brochure printed on recycled paper

*"Praised be you, my Lord,
through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us . . .*

- Francis of Assisi

Natural Burial:
An option
for FSPA

What is natural or green burial?

Natural or green burial is an acceptable alternative to customary burial. It involves returning our bodies to the natural cycle of life by choosing to be buried in a simple biodegradable container without embalming and without a concrete grave liner.

Why is FSPA providing this option for our members?

As Franciscans we recognize the beauty and oneness of all creation knowing that all we do affects everyone and everything. Natural burial is a way to honor the sacredness of our Sister Earth as well as the natural cycle of life and death. Annually in the United States over 800,000 gallons of embalming fluid, more than two million tons of metal and concrete, and an excess of 30 million board feet of hardwoods accompany our bodies into the ground, preventing them from returning naturally to the earth.



If I choose natural burial, where will I be buried?

Burial will take place on FSPA property at Villa St. Joseph in a designated cemetery site currently undergoing restoration to native prairie grasses and flowers.

Why did FSPA establish our own cemetery?

The La Crosse Catholic Cemetery, like most other cemeteries, requires a vault or a concrete grave liner in order to keep the ground from sinking. There are no state regulations requiring either, and any settling of the ground will blend in with the natural prairie landscape.

What will happen when I die?

If you die at Villa St. Joseph, sisters and family/friends who are present will gather in your room to pray and say their goodbyes. Your body will then be gently cared for by the Villa staff with the assistance of a funeral director. Since embalming will not occur, your body will not be taken to a funeral home. It will be cleansed, dressed in a simple garb, placed in an open wooden container and brought to a room near the chapel for visitation and prayer. If your death occurs before 3 p.m., your funeral will most likely take place the following day during the 9 a.m. Eucharistic Liturgy. Your body will then be taken to our cemetery for burial. A memorial Eucharistic Liturgy will be celebrated at a convenient later date in Mary of the Angels Chapel.

How will the congregation, my family and friends be invited to participate?

You are asked to provide a list of persons whom you wish to keep abreast of your condition as you approach the final days of your life. These persons as well as our sisters will be notified as your health changes and

encouraged to visit you. Some may be able to accompany you in your journey toward new life and stay or return for your funeral. Those unable to be present at this time will be invited to your memorial service at St. Rose Convent.

What do I need to do if I want a natural burial?

1. Learn about natural burials; review FSPA policy and procedure for a natural burial and discern with your local community and mission councilor.
2. Discuss your wishes with your family and friends so that they understand the timing and the differences in funeral procedure.
3. Request an agreement form from the congregational secretary and return it to her with your choices and required signatures. Provide the secretary with a list of persons whom you wish to notify of your approaching death.
4. Complete and submit the Funeral Liturgy Form to the Liturgy Office with your wishes for readings, songs, symbols, etc.

What happens if I die at a location other than the Villa?

If the location is within three to five hours from La Crosse, efforts will be made to transport your body to St. Rose or the Villa for the funeral and burial. Sisters who choose natural burial are asked to indicate their alternate wishes on the agreement form should distance prohibit a natural burial in our cemetery.