

## BURIALS AND FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

As part of our preparation for our own or the deaths of others we know and care for, it is important to think about and discuss the manner of the disposition of our bodies after death. There is no prescribed manner of burial under the Quaker tradition, but it is helpful to think about how the manner of burial can reflect the values and beliefs of the deceased.

It is important to note that each state has its own laws about the disposition of human remains and this information can be found under the relevant state website, a local funeral director, or the Funeral Consumers Alliance ( [www.funerals.org](http://www.funerals.org)). For example, burials on one's own property are allowed in some states and not others.

There are typically three major options for the disposition of bodies.

1. Burial: Arrangements for internment ideally need to be made well in advance of the event. Burials can take several forms, including embalming in a casket or natural burials without a casket. (see following section on Green Burials).
2. Cremation: There are now also several means of cremation (see following section on Green Burials) and some are more ecologically friendly than others. As with burials, there are specific local and state rules regarding the scattering of ashes. For example, the scattering of ashes is not allowed in the Chesapeake Bay. As with burials, If ashes are to be interred, the same need for planning ahead exists to reserve a space in a columbarium or in a burial plot.
3. Donation for medical research or transplant: It is necessary for family members to know in advance if one wants to donate one's body to medical research as action on this is required immediately after death. The [State Anatomy Board of Maryland](http://www.state.md.us/health/abmd/) requires the prospective donor to complete a [donor form](#). Only pre-registered Donors are accepted. The form can be requested by phone, email, website, or in writing. All costs are paid for by the State. An advance directive is not sufficient to become a Donor.

There are several other ways of donating bodies, including to individual hospitals and medical schools such as Georgetown. Information on this can be found at [som.georgetown.edu](http://som.georgetown.edu). [DonatelifeDC.org](http://DonatelifeDC.org) is one organization whose mission is to increase the supply of organ donors. The National Anatomical Service (NAS) may be called at any time (800 727-0700) to transport cadavers to medical schools with the greatest need.

Mortuary Services: A funeral parlor will provide assistance with legal forms, obtaining burial permits, notices in newspapers and arranging for viewings as needed. Maryland, however, does not require the use of a funeral director. The Funeral Consumers Alliance ([www.funerals.org](http://www.funerals.org)) is a non-profit consumer advice organization which provides information and assistance with regards to local funeral services

### Quaker Burial Places

Unfortunately, Bethesda Friends Meeting does not have its own Quaker burial plot. [Sandy Spring Meeting](#) has a graveyard but at this time it is for members of Sandy Spring and other

Quakers who have had a relationship with the Meeting. Most other Quaker graveyards in Maryland (of which there were many) are now not operational. If a Quaker burial is desired, an application to Sandy Spring Graveyard and Grounds Committee is necessary through the SS Monthly Meeting office. There is also a Memorial Garden for the scattering of ashes at SS where guidelines might be less strict as space constraints are not as pressing.

## **FUNERALS AND BURIALS IN THE TIME OF COVID**

Starting in 2020, COVID has placed extra burdens on those faced with dying and death. There is the need for extra support for families who are unable to visit loved ones and who may not be able to say farewell with dignity. There is the need for extra care for the bereaved who may not have been able to hold a fitting memorial or funeral service due to restrictions on gatherings. There is also a sense of powerlessness in the face of the pandemic which can swiftly take loved ones without much notice or keep them suffering for long periods of time. It may be that a death from COVID negates the ability to donate a cadaver to science, in which case alternative arrangements need to be made.

Attention should be paid to the legal restrictions on large gatherings for the purposes of funerals and in the home or elsewhere for receptions. Information on this should be gathered from State and County websites and from the CDC. This information changes rapidly so there will be no specific recommendations in these guidelines. Readers are asked to check their local information sites for up-to-date information.

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## **Information about Green (or Natural) Burials**

The Green Burial Council has a very useful website at [www.greenburialcouncil.org](http://www.greenburialcouncil.org). It defines green burial as:

a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and/or preservation of habitat.

According to the website, green burial involves one or more of the following elements:

- Foregoing embalming
- Not using concrete vaults that ordinarily house the casket in the ground
- Replacing toxic burial containers with natural ones
- Using a cemetery committed to preserving or restoring natural habitat

Green Burial Council has an excellent fact sheet about what each of these elements entails, including the questions to ask and things to look out for when researching green burial. A copy is attached. The website includes a host of additional information that is well worth perusing, including a list of green burial sites by state. (Many cemeteries do not allow green burial, in part because not using a concrete vault makes it much harder to maintain a level surface.)

Another useful website is [www.kinkaraco.com](http://www.kinkaraco.com), which sells green burial products such as shrouds and caskets, but also has a lot of useful information, including the location of green burial cemeteries around the U.S.

The seminal book on green burial is Mark Harris's *Grave Matters*, published in 2008 but apparently still the definitive work on the subject. It provides a huge amount of information on the benefits of green burial and all the variants thereof, and it is written in a very engaging style. I will donate my copy to the BFM Library.

### **Locations in the DC area where green burial is allowed:**

- **Cool Spring Natural Cemetery at Holy Cross Abbey**  
Berryville, VA <https://www.virginiatrappists.org/cemetery/>

This cemetery is on the grounds of a Trappist monastery located on a beautiful property in Berryville, VA. It provides for several different kinds of green burials. It doesn't perform burial services, but allows services of all kinds.

From the website:

Monks as lovers of the place have always cherished the land on which they lived and Cool Spring Natural Cemetery forms a concrete expression of this love and witnesses to monasticism's abiding respect for, and stewardship of, the earth and the environment. Deciding to be buried on this sacred property establishes one in a unique and privileged relationship to this living monastic tradition that so encapsulates the sacredness of all life and the dignity of the human person.

It is this sacredness of life and the dignity of each human person that is honored by a natural burial, which requires that the body not be embalmed, that the casket not be of metal, and that there be no vault. Graves are marked with simple engraved stones obtained from these same sacred grounds. Natural burial is thus a natural returning of the body to the earth from which it came.

- **Historic Congressional Cemetery**  
1801 E St. SE, Washington, DC, 20003 <https://www.congressionalcemetery.org>

From the website:

Historic Congressional Cemetery is an interdenominational burial ground and accommodates several types of interments, from eco-friendly green burials and inurnments to traditional casket burials. Accommodations are routinely made for family preferences, religious practices, and personal lifestyles and beliefs. We do not require the use of a concrete vault or grave liner, nor do we require embalming of decedents. Families are encouraged to become involved with the burial and ritual process of their

choice as long as it does not conflict with state law. Headstones are optional, but must fit within the measurements of the plot itself (see Rules & Regulations for more detail).

- **Bestgate Memorial Park**

814 Bestgate Road,  
Annapolis, MD 21401

<https://www.lastingtributesfuneralcare.com/what-we-do/going-green>

From their website:

In order to provide the families we serve the availability of natural (“Green”) burial, we have tailored a specialized green funeral option in our privately owned Green Burial section of Bestgate Memorial Park.

The caskets used to enclose and transport your loved one are made of bio-degradable materials and are available in such materials as wicker and wood. Outer enclosures are not permitted in our Green Burial Section of Bestgate Memorial Park.

Green Burial does not employ any chemical treatment (embalming) of the body. Due to the availability of onsite refrigeration, we are able to hold the remains to provide time for family and friends to gather for a service.

We provide families with a hand dug grave to reduce damage to the earth that heavy equipment could cause. A river rock memorial will be custom made and placed where your loved one is buried to assist in locating the grave.

Burial of cremated remains is also an option in our Green Burial section of Bestgate Memorial Park. We have a wide variety of biodegradable pressed cotton, wood and other eco-friendly urns available if you prefer cremation.

Bestgate cemetery is a non-profit cemetery that is owned by a group of funeral home directors. It offers green burial exclusively through an Annapolis funeral home, Lasting Tributes - Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam. <https://www.lastingtributesfuneralcare.com>.

- **Rapp Funeral and Cremation Services**

933 Grist Ave, Silver Spring, MD

301 565-4100, <https://www.rappfuneral.com>

This is a local funeral home in Silver Spring that offers green burial options. It claims to be the only DC area funeral home approved by the Green Burial Council.