

31 May 2021

Dear

Re: The future of Cemeteries in New South Wales

www.saveourgraves.com.au

As you may have seen in the media this week, the NSW Government has announced that it will merge all cemetery trusts into a single government-run trust and to dismiss faith-based operators, including the Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (CMCT). This decision will end the involvement of faith groups in the management and operation of cemeteries in favour of a secular government run bureaucracy. This will bring to an end more than 150 years of the Church's role in burying the dead, upkeep of the graves and support to grieving families.

For more than four years, CMCT, the Archdiocese as well as other religious groups have been in consultation with the State Government to try and find a solution to the issues currently facing Sydney cemeteries. The most significant of these issues are:

- a lack of burial space in Sydney cemeteries, with many of them expected to close to new interments in the next decade;
- the need for sufficient funds to be set aside for the ongoing maintenance of cemeteries; and
- the need to provide affordable funerals and burials for all people.

CMCT offered solutions that would solve each of these issues, and do so in a way that could be implemented immediately at no cost to Government or taxpayer. The Government's decision will be significantly more costly, take a longer time to implement, and exclude religious groups from any involvement in operations. It makes no sense.

I am forwarding to you my opinion piece in *The Australian* (27th May) on this decision. Given the extraordinary manner in which the Government has gone about this and the

extensive impact this will have on our community and Church, I ask that you alert your parishioners and parish communities to this latest development and encourage them to write and or phone their local member of parliament in an appeal to reverse this decision.

They might also consider encouraging friends elsewhere in NSW to do the same. You may wish to consider the following points:

1. Caring for the dead is a spiritual mission, not secular. Our faith teaches that it is one of our “corporal works of mercy” and this underpins the way we look after our cemeteries. The government seems to only really recognise cemetery property as a monetary asset without sensitivity to its spiritual element or the wishes of families of the deceased.
2. The Catholic Cemetery Trust has successfully and reverently managed Catholic cemeteries for more than 150 years. How can the government claim to the legacy of over 15 decades of care and reverent upkeep, as well as substantial funds that have been paid by Catholic and non-Catholic families for the maintenance and future care of our cemeteries, without even proper consultation?
3. The decision raises uncertainty about whether graves will be kept in perpetuity. A secular bureaucracy that does not appreciate the reverence needed to be shown to the deceased could be tempted to reuse graves to make more space.
4. The cost of burials will almost certainly increase, because the cemeteries will no longer be operated by charitable providers.
5. This does not just affect Catholic communities but also Muslim, Jewish and other Christian and non-Christian communities whom the Catholic Cemeteries Trust has been supporting these past years.
6. The government suddenly announced this decision without adequately consulting the Church and other faith leaders, evidently emboldened by the results of the Upper Hunter by-election. The brazen disregard for faiths does not bode well for the manner in which the government may deal with Catholic funerals and graves in the future.

An online petition page has been established www.saveourgraves.com.au I'd encourage you all to sign this petition and to circulate this to your family and friends in NSW.

I appreciate your support in this matter. Please be assured of my ongoing prayers for you all in your ministry.

Yours fraternally in Christ