



*This is an artist's rendition of the area for the final resting place for cremated remains under Regina Pacis Basilica in Bensonhurst.*

Regina Pacis Basilica in Bensonhurst will soon be the home of the new “St. Joseph Chapel and Columbarium,” which will be located under the main basilica.

When Regina Pacis was originally built in 1950, it had a completely functioning lower church, which was needed because of the large numbers of parishioners in the area at that time. Over the years, as people moved away, the lower church became unnecessary and the space was emptied and used for many things from bingo to tennis. The space is the same size as the upper church.

The current pastor, Msgr. Ronald Marino, began to explore ideas on using that space again. After some consultations, it was decided to restore the space to a worship site where Masses, prayer sessions and other religious functions could take place. It was also decided to include areas along the sides of the new chapel which would house the cremated remains of people who had died, were cremated and whose families wished them to be buried in Regina Pacis. This area is called a columbarium.

With the growing number of people who choose cremation as a final disposition after death, the ability to house these remains inside a basilica is a beautiful idea, said Msgr. Marino, who cited the high cost of cemetery burials and funerals in general. He wanted to create a dignified Catholic alternative for people to choose.

“While many people thought that the Catholic Church prohibited cremation, the Bishops of the United States permit it as long as the cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and care as the human body,” Msgr. Marino explained.

A wake service and funeral Mass are still celebrated for the deceased, and later on, the cremated remains are brought to the basilica for the ceremony of inurnment in the columbarium.

Msgr. Marino added that the idea of burial in a local church where people could visit anytime, along with the lower costs, which would be involved in purchasing burial niches, makes this project very desirable.

“Former parishioners now living in Florida, North Carolina, California, Staten Island and many other places, continue to call to inquire about reserving niches for themselves and their families,” he added.

The possibility of burial in St. Joseph Chapel is open to all Catholics and their families.

Pastorally speaking, this is an attempt to address the situation where families choose cremation for a Catholic loved one, without providing for the Catholic Rite of Burial which is the right of every baptized Catholic. It also gives dignified closure to families who are still in possession of the cremated remains of a loved one.

The Catholic Church forbids the scattering of ashes, making jewelry from them, dividing the cremated remains among family members or keeping them at home. The Church requires that cremated remains be buried in a cemetery grave or in a blessed columbarium.

St. Joseph Chapel and Columbarium will be blessed by Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio on Nov. 1.