

**COLUMBARIUM POLICY AND COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES**  
**MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**Update approved by MLC Council, September 12, 2024**

The purpose of Messiah Lutheran Church's Columbarium is to provide a final resting place for the cremated remains of members or the families of church members. It is a priority of this congregation to ensure that all cremated remains continue to be located in the current columbarium niche area. If a future situation requires the current niches be repaired or relocated, every effort will be made to relocate all niches to a similarly dignified and religious location.

**1. What is a columbarium?**

- a. A columbarium is a place where people's cremated remains are kept. The purpose of our columbarium is to maintain a member's or member family's remains in a perpetual and religious setting.
- b. Messiah Lutheran Church maintains a columbarium wall in an alcove near the front of the sanctuary near the pulpit.
- c. Our columbarium consists of 24 single niches and 30 double niches.

**2. Why do we need a columbarium?**

- a. The church has always been involved at the time of death – providing emotional support, serving meals, conducting funeral or memorial services, and providing a place to put the body.
- b. Some churches have a cemetery on the property. Messiah Lutheran Church provides a columbarium for people who prefer cremation.

**3. How much does each individual niche cost?**

- a. The cost of a niche (which accommodates the cremains of one person) is \$200.
- b. A family set of two adjoining niches is \$400.
- c. Once purchased, the cost is nonrefundable.
- d. The cost paid for a niche(s) is a non tax-deductible fee.

**4. What is included in the purchase of a niche(s)?**

- a. When purchased, the individual may select any available single/family niche.
- b. All available niches measure 6 inches deep, 7 ½ inches high, and 9 ¾ inches wide. A suitably sized urn for the cremains can be purchased from most mortuaries.
- c. Once selected, a blank brass plate will be affixed to the front of the desired niche to indicate this niche has been selected for future use.
- d. The name, birth and death dates are etched on this brass plate soon after interment.
- e. The brass plate is the only permanent adornment of each niche. Small crosses, flowers or other items exclusive to a specific niche may be placed on the niche for no more than three months. The Columbarium Committee will periodically remove all such adornments.

- f. The purchaser does not “own” the space; the property is owned and perpetually maintained by the congregation.
- g. A listing of all purchased niches is maintained in the church records and is overseen by the Columbarium Committee. (2024 change)

**5. What if the purchaser changes his/her mind and decides not to use the selected niche(s)?**

- a. The purchaser, family member or appointed representative should notify Messiah Lutheran Church of the decision to not use the niche(s). This decision to return it/them for future disposition should be in writing addressed to the MLC Columbarium Committee.
- b. There will be no refund if a niche is returned except as outlined in paragraph 5.d. and 6.f.
- c. A niche(s) cannot be transferred to another individual.
- d. If a family decides to use only one of a family/double niche, the double niche will be exchanged for an available single at no additional cost. This is the only instance where there is an option to make a transfer of niches. (2024 change)

**6. What if the family or appointed representative decides to remove cremains from the selected niche?**

- a. The purchaser, family member or appointed representative should notify Messiah Lutheran Church in writing of their intention to remove an urn with cremains and to transfer them to another location.
- b. This written request must assure Messiah Lutheran Church’s Columbarium Committee that all laws and procedures will be followed and that the transfer of cremains will be accomplished in a dignified and respectful manner.
- c. There will be no refund if a niche is emptied for any reason.
- d. A niche(s) cannot be transferred to another individual.
- e. The now emptied niche will be placed on the list of available niches for distribution to others to purchase.
- f. If only one urn from a family niche is removed, the family member or appointed representative will direct the disposition of the other urn. (2024 change)
  - i. If the second urn is to remain in our columbarium, the family member or appointed representative will select a then available single niche.
  - ii. There will be no additional cost if this option is exercised.
  - iii. The now empty family niche will be placed on the list of available niches.

**7. What if a person, family, or appointed representative does not notify Messiah Lutheran Church of their intention to not use the purchased niche(s)?**

- a. If it comes to the Columbarium Committee’s attention that an individual(s) who has purchased a niche(s) has died with remains permanently dispositioned to a site or manner that indicates the select Columbarium niche(s) will not be used, the following actions will be taken. (2024 change)

- i. The Committee will make reasonable effort to confirm that the selected niche(s) will not be used in the future.
  - ii. The Committee will then make a good faith effort to confirm the accuracy of this information with the family or appropriate representative.
  - iii. The Committee will then request in writing that the family or appropriate representative acknowledge(s), also in writing, that the selected niche(s) will not be used by the specified purchaser.
  - iv. If the committee does not receive written confirmation of non-use of the select niche(s), paragraph 7 b will become the ongoing process.
- b. If the Columbarium Committee is unable to complete the required actions of 7 a, or if a person is “presumed” dead with cremains not placed in the selected niche, the following process will be followed. (2024 change)
  - i. All appropriate actions listed in paragraph 7 a. will be accomplished.
  - ii. If there is no confirmation of death, but the individual records indicate the person’s age is over 110, the niche will be assumed as not for use by the purchaser and will be placed in the list of available niches.

**8. What if there is a need to repair, modify, or move the niches in use or purchased for future use? (2024 change)**

- a. The Messiah Lutheran Church Council has placed a high priority on maintaining the sanctity and dignity of our columbarium. If the congregation ceases to be a worshipping community or for other reason can no longer support the columbarium for its intended use, the actions of this paragraph will be followed.
- b. In case of a natural facility disaster, such as tornado or fire, that requires repair, modification, or relocation of the columbarium, the following actions will be accomplished.
  - i. All family or appropriate representative of individuals already placed into the columbarium will be notified using any available records. Similarly, individuals who have selected niche(s) for future use will be notified using available records. A list of those contacted and those that could not be contacted will be maintained by the Columbarium Committee.
  - ii. All repairs will be accomplished in a manner to ensure the dignity, security and accountability of all niches an/or urns.
  - iii. If the damage has rendered the facility or columbarium area to be beyond repair, all urns will be moved to an appropriate temporary or permanent location. Any transfer or movement of urns or cremains will be with the approval of a family/representative(s) (if available) with cost of new location to be borne by Messiah Lutheran Church.

**9. What is the process to purchase a niche(s)?**

- a. A handout will be made available to anyone who is interested in purchasing a columbarium niche. This simple electronic or paper brochure will provide the basic information on the process of purchasing a niche(s) for future use. The brochure

- will also have a link to this Policy and to the Columbarium Subscription Agreement that will be signed when purchasing a niche(s).
- b. As noted on the current handout, the purpose of the columbarium at Messiah Lutheran Church is to maintain the remains or cremains of member's or member family's in a perpetual and religious setting.
  - c. After a person or family has reviewed the available documents, they/he/she should meet with member(s) of the Messiah Lutheran Columbarium Committee to review the process of purchasing and using a niche(s) in our columbarium.
    - i. The person or family will be shown the currently available niche(s) and given the opportunity to select a preferred niche(s)
    - ii. The Committee Member(s) will review the specifics of this Policy and the Columbarium Subscription Agreement with the person or family.
    - iii. The person or family will then sign the Columbarium Subscription Agreement and present a check for the agreed fees made out to Messiah Lutheran Church with notation for the "Columbarium Fund."
    - iv. The selected niche(s) will be noted on the Agreement.
  - d. The committee will then confirm the niche(s) selection.
    - i. A notation will be made in the church's columbarium listing of purchased and in use niches.
    - ii. An index card with the name of the purchasers will be placed in the selected niche(s).
    - iii. A blank name plate will be affixed to the outside of the selected niche(s).

#### **10. What are the responsibilities and actions of the Columbarium Committee?**

- a. The Columbarium Committee will consist of three members of the congregation. One member will be appointed by the Church Council in January of each year. The normal term will be three years with no restrictions on the number of terms.
- b. The Committee will ensure a current handout is available to anyone who is interested in purchasing a columbarium niche. This simple electronic or paper brochure will provide the basic information on the process of purchasing a niche(s) for future use. The brochure will also have a link to this Policy and to the Columbarium Subscription Agreement that must be signed when purchasing a niche(s).
- c. The Committee members will be responsible for maintaining the complete list of all available, purchased, and niches with cremains. This list will be maintained electronically or in a notebook, accessible at the church office.
- d. The Committee will ensure that each niche has a brass plate.
  - i. The niches that have not been selected will have a blank brass plate placed inside.
  - ii. The niches that have been purchased will have a blank plate attached to the outside and an index card with the purchaser's name inside the niche.
  - iii. When the cremains of a deceased are placed in a niche, the Committee will confirm that the brass plate has been inscribed with the appropriate

Name, Birth and Death Dates. The complete plate will then be reaffixed to the front of the niche.

- e. A Committee member will periodically remove all individual niche adornments to maintain the columbarium in a dignified and religious environment.
- f. The Committee members will keep this policy, the Subscription Agreement, and the subject handout/brochure updated. This includes the recommendation of columbarium fee updates.
- g. A member will meet with anyone who requests additional information about purchasing a niche(s).
- h. When a person/family wants to purchase a niche(s), a member of the Committee will meet with them to discuss the process in detail to include a review of this Policy. The member will also confirm that the person/family understands the requirements when signing the Subscription Agreement.
- i. After a review by a Committee member, he/she will oversee the final signing of the Columbarium Subscription Agreement.

**11. What are the actions required of the Senior Pastor(s)?**

- a. The Pastor will be notified by the Columbarium Committee of any changes to individual niches or new niche purchases.
- b. The Pastor will ensure that all funeral or memorial services are conducted according to the guidelines of the ELCA.

**12. What are the church relationships and constitutional requirements of the Columbarium Committee?**

- a. The Columbarium Committee shall report to the Executive Committee. It shall establish and review policies regarding Columbarium Policy, the Columbarium Subscription Agreement, and the required handout/brochure. It will bring Columbarium recommendations to the Church Council through the Executive Committee.
- b. The Columbarium Committee will confirm the establishment of said committee via a Continuing Resolution to the Congregational Constitution.