

NEWS

Removal of St. Ann's Calvary Cemetery graveside decorations creates big stir

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Calvary Cemetery's rules, as posted on the sign at right, have become a point of controversy for some Wadena area residents.

By news@wadenapj.com

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St. Ann's Calvary Cemetery has been cleared of graveside decorations, and some people in the Wadena area are upset.

Police Chief Bruce Uselman said the police department had been getting calls about it and has mediated between people, but there have been no serious incidents or crimes involved.

Urns, plants, statues and other decorations have been removed and placed at or near the wood lattice structure and trash bins on the cemetery's south side and labeled with the owners' last names.

The Rev. Don Wagner, priest at St. Ann's Catholic Church, said the owners could pick up their belongings in that area. There is no deadline yet, but people are encouraged to recover the items as soon as possible.

Uselman said that one individual wanting to be a Good Samaritan took some of the items to her own home to call the owners individually to pick them up.

"I think she was with the understanding that these ornaments would be tossed, or go on some type of rummage sale, and I don't think that was ever the case. I think a lot of it was rumor and speculation," Uselman said.

Those items were returned to the cemetery to be picked up in the designated spot as instructed by the church office.

Uselman said that clearing of cemeteries is normal.

"They basically clean the cemetery out so they can mow and trim after Memorial Day holiday and stuff, so it's pretty typical for most cemeteries. So people become upset over that," Uselman said.

Reminders of the cemetery rules and plans to remove decorations were and were printed in at least the June 12 and June 19 church bulletins reminding parishioners of the June 20 deadline.

However, Mim Maas of Wadena said that the notice was too short, and that not everyone who has a loved one buried at Calvary Cemetery attends St. Ann's every Sunday.

She said that items placed to remember the departed were being unceremoniously ripped out of the ground and thrown in a pile.

Maas works with a Catholic client who did not realize what was happening until she read the church bulletin left when she received the Holy Eucharist at home.

A copy of the rules also ran in the June 18 Pioneer Journal, two days before the deadline.

Wagner said the rules about decorations had always been there, although enforcement had been inconsistent.

He said that enforcing the rules more strictly this year was about being fair to everyone after getting some complaints, liability issues and ongoing maintenance.

Wagner said the issue would be discussed with the cemetery board and possibly the parish council.

He said that cemeteries have always been a source of controversy.

The Calvary Cemetery is part of the Catholic Dioceses of Minnesota. The preamble for Parish Cemetery Rules and Regulations, which applies to Catholic cemeteries around the state, says, "Every certificate of ownership issued for an interment space purchased from a parish cemetery within the Catholic dioceses of Minnesota contains a provision that the grantee takes title subject to the rules and regulations then in force and which may be enacted in the future."

The Wadena city cemetery next to Calvary Cemetery is owned by the nonprofit Wadena Cemetery Association and still has colorful decorations up by grave sites, although it does not allow artificial flowers and Styrofoam decorations after June 15. Dennis Olson, president of the Wadena Cemetery Association, said that it is normal for cemeteries to have rules and regulations.

Wagner said that people with questions or concerns about the Calvary Cemetery should call the St. Ann's church office at (218) 631-1593.