



Green burials use coffins, caskets, and shrouds made of biodegradable substances like bamboo, wicker, silk, or hemp instead of modern materials such as metal or concrete. Wood that is sustainably harvested is also a good option. Photo-Pixabay.

# Green burials

Environmentally friendly burials minimize impact on local and global environment

**Mary Raddon**

*“For dust you are and to dust you will return.”*  
Genesis 3:19b.

As Christians, we believe in life everlasting and the resurrection of the body, and that is our glorious hope. Nonetheless, we do have to make plans for how we want our physical bodies dealt with after we have passed to new life.

The choices are many.

In recent history, the care of the body of the deceased has been entrusted to commercial funeral homes, which provide many services, generally in a professional, respectful way. They offer transportation, facilities for gatherings, embalming, coffins, cremation or burials in registered cemeteries. Most funeral homes will allow families to choose as many or as few of their services as the family desires.

Some people opt for metal caskets and burial in cement or steel vaults and some cemeteries require such. For others, the environmental as well as financial cost is an issue. Cement and steel manufacturing are among the top greenhouse gas emitters. Furthermore, graves with vaults need to be deep, so that excavation with fossil fuel machinery is necessary. Embalming generally uses formalde-

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hyde, a dangerously toxic chemical.

Another option is cremation. New technology has reduced the amount of gases, greenhouse and others, resulting from cremation, but nevertheless, cremation is not an environmentally friendly way to deal with a deceased body in that the required high temperatures necessitate the use of some fossil fuel.

An option which is more earth-friendly is simply to return our bodies to the earth as the Scripture says; to dust you shall return. Green burial means that our bodies become part of the earth and in our burial we nurture the soil and the life within and above it. With green burial a wooden or wicker casket with no metal parts or sim-

ply a cloth shroud made of natural fibre is used to hold the body.

There are designated cemeteries where the grave can be shallow (two and a half feet) and thus hand dug. No embalming is necessary if the committal is within just a few days. If it is necessary for the body to be kept for a longer period, such as when the ground is frozen, environmentally friendly embalming fluids are available.

For families for whom memorialization is important a tree or a local stone can serve as a grave marker. Usually ‘green’ graves are located in a natural, secluded wooded area or a natural meadow. A green burial is normally lower cost.

It is important to note that funeral homes and cemeteries are subject to regulation by the legislature of Ontario, but more and more funeral homes and cemeteries are willing to provide green burials.

Finally, one might consider organ donation or the donation of one’s entire body to research. Medical schools are in need of such donations and the body will be of service to others even after one has passed into new life.

Whatever our choices are, it is comforting and gratifying to know that our bodies are respected and have value after death, and that we can be sure of a new resurrected body with Christ Jesus in his kingdom.