

Finding peace in a funeral home project

By: [Garrett Andrews](#) in [Architecture and Engineering](#) April 14, 2017 3:39 pm



A chapel at Gethsemani Catholic Cemetery in Happy Valley is being renovated and expanded to include full-service funeral facilities. (Sam Tenney/DJC)

Portland will become the smallest Catholic archdiocese in the country with a full-service funeral home upon completion of a \$1.4 million addition/renovation at the chapel of Gethsemani Catholic Cemetery.

Mark Jacobs Construction is at about the midpoint of adding 2,700 square feet to the 57-year-old chapel. The 56-year-old, mid-century modern building is also being brought up to current seismic code.

The project is intended to allow the archdiocese to perform full funeral arrangements and services, [Archibishop Alexander K. Sample wrote](#) to church members last year.

“This church-owned and operated facility will be a model for the entire archdiocese as to how to minister to Catholic families at the time of death,” he wrote. “To be able to provide funeral home services in complete fidelity to the church’s sensibilities at a funeral will be a great blessing for all of our people.”

There are three cemeteries within the 29,717-square mile Archdiocese of Portland – Gethsemani, Mount Calvary Catholic Cemetery in west Portland and Mount Calvary in Eugene.

The project is an extension of the corporal works of mercy – caring for the dead – which the church has always done, Director of Cemeteries Tim Corbett said. New features will include a crematorium, embalming, caskets and a sales area.

Even church members aren’t always sure what the rules are for bodies after death. “There’s not always a lot of clarity when it comes to cremation and Catholics,” he said. “One of the roles we’re trying to fill is in education, more than anything.”

For one thing, cremation is “definitely” allowed for Catholics, Corbett said. That change was issued by the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. And cremated remains began to be allowed at Catholic altars in the U.S. starting in the early 1990s.

What the church does not allow is the commingling of different people’s ashes, or scattering them, Corbett said.

Catholics generally display the body of the deceased when possible. This was an interesting design consideration for the chapel, said architect Chris LoNigro of **DiLoreto Architecture**.

“You’re really trying to create a moment of silence for everybody,” he said. “So there’s a series of moments as you enter and walk through the building. We were constantly asking, how does this feel?”

Liturgical architecture is all about creating serenity and a sense of place, LoNigro said. Funeral homes are a bit different from churches, but the architect’s goal is still the same.

LoNigro has designed many church projects, but Gethsemani is his first funeral home. DiLoreto Architecture, run by husband and wife Chris and Ann DiLoreto, specializes in religious structures.

One design challenge was joining the two existing buildings, the administrative office and the chapel, and maintaining a consistent appearance.

“It’s actually a very nice, tiny building, but its ceiling height for most of it was only eight feet tall,” LoNigro said. “And trying to get all the systems and insulation and everything in there that’s required nowadays, it posed its own intrigue.”

The project employs a charred wood cladding product from the Portland office of **Nakamoto Forestry**. Treated on their outward face, the “[Gendai](#)” planks are highly rot- and insect-resistant. Because of a residue the product leaves behind, workers installing it are asked to wear gloves, said project manager Jason LeTourneau of Mark Jacobs Construction.

Gethsemani Funeral Home addition/renovation

Architect: DiLoreto Architecture

Contractor: Mark Jacobs Construction

Cost: \$1.4 million

Expected completion: June 10