

Sharing Holy Ground

Clover Hill adopts new rules to accommodate non-Jewish spouses and cremains.

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Associate Editor

Clover Hill Park, the cemetery of Congregation Shaarey Zedek of Oakland County, has completed a two-year study and will now allow a non-Jewish spouse to be buried next to a Jewish spouse in a new, separate section of the cemetery. It will also allow the remains from a cremation in another new, separate section.

Larry Jackier, chairman of the board of Clover Hill, sent a letter to Shaarey Zedek members in August. A similar letter will be sent in the coming months to the families of non-members buried at Clover Hill. The cemetery is located on 14 Mile, between Woodward and Coolidge.

Jackier's letter states, in part: "We have designated a separate section for the burial of cremated remains that complies with the opinion of the Conservative Movement's Committee of Jewish Law and Standards in a unanimous decision made in 1986 (a copy of this teshuvah can be found at our Web site, www.cloverhillpark.org) ...

"Our community will continue to counsel families that cremation does not meet the mitzvah of *k'vod hameit* (honoring the body by burying it in the ground after death) and is not endorsed by Jewish Law or by the Shaarey Zedek rabbinate.

"However, the reality is that for many different reasons, there are circumstances within families where cremation becomes the final decision. In these situations, it becomes our obligation to respond to the needs of the mourners. Consistent with balancing these considerations, plots for cremated remains cannot be purchased in advance, but only after the fact ...

"Another area has been established as a separate section to allow for Jewish persons and non-Jewish spouses to be buried together. Here we are responding to the demography of blended families in a way that maintains the traditional requirements of Jewish burial while allowing for the comfort of those who have suffered a loss.

"Extensive research of best practices in other communities and correspondence of the chairpersons of the Conservative Movement's Committee on Law and Standards dated November 1964 and



Clover Hill Park Cemetery in Birmingham

February 2003 have guided this decision and the adoption of standards of practice that are required for burial in this section ..."

Jackier told the *Jewish News* last week the decisions are responding "to the needs of our members. Both of these issues are becoming more and more common."

He said intermarriage without conversion is growing. "Maybe the non-Jewish spouse is just trying to honor his or her parents [by not converting]. But when it comes to burial, they want to be next to their spouse."

At the same time, Jackier said, Clover Hill must maintain the sanctity of Jewish burial areas while also responding to the needs of the community at large, "within reason." Ralph Zuckman, executive director of Clover Hill, agreed. "The biggest issue was to preserve the holy ground of the cemetery and still accommodate those who feel part of our community."

Cremations are a growing trend in America. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) said that nearly 35 percent of the 2.4 million deaths in America were cremated. The 10 states with the most cremations all had 58

percent or more, with Nevada and Washington having nearly 70 percent.

The NFDA predicts that 39 percent of all deaths in 2010 will result in cremations and expects the number to rise to nearly 60 percent by 2025. Cremations are usually less expensive than funerals.

David Techner, a funeral director at Ira Kaufman Chapel in Southfield, said the trend is growing in the Jewish community. "A lot of people are transient and don't have the community history. They are moving to Florida and say, 'Nobody is going to visit a grave.'"

As far as Clover Hill's decision on non-Jewish spouses, Techner believes it was a business decision. "If they force the intermarried to go to Beth El [Memorial Park in Livonia]," he said, "then they lose two or three generations. If you send people away, they don't come back."

He said the trend will force every synagogue and temple to look at their cemetery policies.

Machpelah Cemetery in Ferndale has a separate section for cremains. The section was reportedly approved by the Council of Orthodox Rabbis of Greater Detroit.

Adat Shalom Synagogue in Livonia

inters cremains "as long as the deceased is of the Jewish faith," said Adat Shalom Synagogue Executive Director Alan Yost.

Congregation B'nai Moshe in West Bloomfield has two sections in Oakview Cemetery in Royal Oak and the issues of non-Jewish spouses and cremains were discussed this year. Burying non-Jews in the sections was voted down, said Executive Director Chuck Berris. Rabbi Eliot Pachter ruled that cremains could be allowed as long as it was the entire remains buried in a separate grave.

Rabbi Boruch Levin, executive director of Hebrew Memorial Chapel in Oak Park, tries to explain to people who call him about cremation "that it is prohibited according to Jewish law. I ask if the issue is financial, and we try to assist" people to have a traditional funeral.

"Families that purchased plots at Hebrew Memorial Park when it opened in 1916 know that it is the same cemetery now that it was then," he said.

"We don't get too many calls about cremation and we just don't do them. We are happy to continue that tradition ... And we do not do funerals for someone who is not Jewish." □