

Dear Friends,

July 26th, 2013

St. Joseph Cemetery is very important to all of us in our parish. Recently there was a news story sensationalizing some recent misinformation being disseminated by some neighbors of the cemetery. Our first concern is to assure everyone that the parish cemetery is not being moved and that no graves are being disturbed. The 3.5 acres of surplus property surrounding the western and northern border of the cemetery was sold to a local developer so that the parish could raise funds for our new church. This decision and all of its ramifications have been made public over the past 6 years. Your parish leadership team, the Diocese of Oakland, and the Catholic Cemeteries department reviewed these decisions and followed a prescribed process in making sure that we not only met legal requirements, but that we openly communicated with neighbors, the parish, city planners, and our elected officials. Because many people in our community may not know the facts surrounding this story, we are sharing this information so our parish community may know the facts behind the story.

Over 10 years ago the parish To Build Church Committee inquired about the possible sale of the surplus property. At the time there were approximately 15 monuments scattered up on a hill at the back of the property hundreds of yards away from the cemetery boundaries. There were no parish records showing any sales of burial plots and it was determined that these were pauper graves as there were no records of burials. After posting public notices and seeking approval of the court, we were allowed to disinter the remains of those graves up on the hill and place them within the cemetery proper. During this notification period we actually had contact with relatives of some of the individuals and received their blessing to have their relatives placed within the cemetery proper. In one case, a family located a long lost child who died when she was very young. She was placed with the rest of her family who were already buried in the cemetery.

In the process of the removals the Catholic Cemeteries department of the Diocese found numerous unmarked graves. It was apparent that many other unknown graves existed. Over a few months they removed 251 sets of human remains and placed each one in their own individual burial container and re-buried them in St. Joseph's Cemetery. At the conclusion of this project, we had a committal service, a blessing, and many parishioners and relatives of the deceased attended.

Once the cemeteries department determined that they had explored all of the areas that burials may have taken place outside of the cemetery, we had an outside contractor remove three feet of dirt off of the entire site to determine if there was evidence of unknown burial locations. An archaeologist was present for this entire process and a report was submitted to the City indicating that there was no further evidence of burial sites. After having followed all of these prescribed processes, we received clearance from the City of Fremont to proceed to have the property sold to a developer.

Currently the developer is working to grade the site. They also have an archaeologist on site in case there is any evidence or concern that a burial site still exists. One of the benefits of this entire development is that the cemetery will receive new fencing and landscaping around the site. As a historic site that was once cared for by the families of the deceased, the parish is taking a proactive approach to protecting our cemetery for the future.

We are sorry if the recent news events have caused some families in our parish some anxiety. Please direct anyone with questions to our parish office.

Fr. Manny
and
To Build Church Committee