

# Grace Church Natural Burial Ground

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What is a natural burial? Natural burial is a way to shepherd our hearts and minds as we surround our loved ones in death. As a peaceful, less expensive, and simple alternative, there is no vault, coffin, or embalming. As a result, costs of a funeral are kept low and we become better stewards of the environment. Natural burial presents an opportunity for the church to take a more active role in the death and burial process.

## Where?

Grace has purchased 12.1 acres in Anderson County, SC. The location is two miles from I-85 exit 35, off Browning Road. The grounds are currently ready and available for burial.

## Why Natural Burial?

There are three primary reasons that we, as a church, feel natural burial honors God and follows sound principles of stewardship. Our goal is to equip the local church, steward our finances well, and make wise decisions about the environment.

### 1. Local Church

- a) The church should be a part of every stage of life, including death.
- b) Families are more personally connected to the body and the burial process.
- c) Traditionally, the church was very involved in burial. This modern shift away from the church family has created a disconnect in how we view death. Embalming, caskets, and vaults can create an illusion of hope that is still connected to this world. Returning to the earth and trusting God to resurrect our bodies is central to our Christian hope.

### 2. Financial Stewardship

- a) Funeral costs are high, with the average costs in our area being \$7,000 - \$10,000 for traditional burial with a casket and \$1,600 for cremation with an urn.
- b) Cremation has increased in popularity in the last two decades; however, cremation costs have risen at least 50% in the last five years. People are vulnerable to overspending when grieving.
- c) Simple biodegradable caskets (e.g. pine boxes) or shrouds will greatly reduce cost.

### 3. Environmental Stewardship

- a) In addition to reduced costs, natural burial eliminates embalming, vaults, and grave liners which harm the environment.
- b) Natural decomposition is good conservation.
- c) Each year in the U.S., we bury 800,000 gallons of formaldehyde-based embalming fluid, 115 million tons of steel, 2.3 billion tons of concrete, and enough wood to build 4.6 million single-family homes.

### Another Example of Natural Burial - Westminster, SC

Ramsey Creek is a natural burial site in Westminster, SC. This was the first natural/green burial site in the country and has been incredibly helpful to our church as we explore this idea. They are run by a private organization, and their focus is slightly different, with an emphasis on land conservation.

*Ramsey Creek* in Westminster, SC  
([www.MemorialEcosystems.com](http://www.MemorialEcosystems.com))

### How Did We Get Our Modern Forms of Burial?

Refrigeration, dry ice, or non-formaldehyde embalming products slow down body decomposition and can allow for public viewings and give out-of-town loved ones time to travel. This "American way of death" has been the most popular form of American burial since the 1930s.

[www.theconversation.com/life-after-death-americans-are-embracing-new-ways-to-leave-their-remains-85657](http://www.theconversation.com/life-after-death-americans-are-embracing-new-ways-to-leave-their-remains-85657)



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## FAQs

**What are the steps once someone dies?** There are two sides to caring for a body and planning a funeral. There is a logistical side and a care side that our Care teams and GroupLife staff will continue to provide. Natural burial will bring these two entities together and allow the church to be most engaged in the discipleship process through death and burial.

**What role, if any, does the funeral home play in this process?** We have partnered with Palmetto Mortuary to help facilitate care of the deceased before burial. Members are able to choose to use a funeral home, but it will affect the cost. The burial will need to adhere to Grace Church standards.

**Do you have to be a member to be buried there?** This option is available for members and their families. It is not an open burial site for anyone.

**How much does it cost a family to bury someone naturally?** The cost for natural burial is \$2000. This includes opening and closing of the grave, transportation, stone or area marking, and general land upkeep.

**How many people can be buried there?** A standard grave is about eight feet long and two and a half feet wide. With over 12 acres of property, thousands of people can be buried.

**What are ongoing operating expenses for the church?** Expenses include some upkeep for the grounds, records of burial plots, and general maintenance once the land is purchased and laid out.

**Are there cremation options?** No—our focus with natural burial is securing a resting place in the ground for a recently deceased body.

**Does the church need a license to conduct natural burial?** No state license is needed for natural burial or church nature preserve.

**Are other churches doing this?** Not that we know of locally.

**Are there still additional needs for this project?** Yes—we would love to have a small “pole barn” chapel on location for funeral services. There is also additional site work needed.

**Do you have additional resources you can share?** Yes—we have plenty that we could share, or we would love to have a conversation with you. Please email Jennifer Dill, Funeral & Bereavement Coordinator, at [jdill@gracechurchsc.org](mailto:jdill@gracechurchsc.org) for questions and more information.

