

Customer Service the *Catholic* Way



— by Leah DeTommaso and Staff

Life is built around memories. As we walk through life, memories are created by the things we do, places we visit, relationships we build and experiences we encounter. Unfortunately, not all memories are positive. One of our cemetery employees shared one such experience with me. Her daughter was graduating with her nursing degree. She called a popular restaurant, well in advance, and made dinner reservations for family and friends to gather and celebrate the monumental occasion. When the day came, it was spoiled by terrible customer service.

Apparently, the restaurant had overbooked the evening and in the middle of the graduation festivities they were made aware that their tables would be needed to seat another large party. What should have been a memorable

*Sometimes a
business model can obstruct
good customer service.*

evening turned out to be a frustrating and upsetting occasion. Many of us have probably had similar experiences with poor customer service. The experience can leave us angry and frustrated. As in this case, these emotions can also fuel our pledge to avoid visiting that business establishment ever again or even recommending it to others.

Sometimes a business model can be an obstruction to good customer service. Many have referred to the inability of service and product providers to meet the individualized needs of consumers as the result of the *McDonaldization of Society*. Dr. George Ritzer has identified



Ruth Rivera, a Pre-need Advisor, helps a visitor with selections.

and defined four dimensions of the *McDonaldization* process: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. In addition, the model strives to anticipate situational outcomes and to direct those outcomes through a rigid set of rules. Thus, employee and consumer behavior is managed by protocols; little room is left for meeting the unique needs of an individual.

The *McDonaldization Model* brings many benefits. Products and services become available to a greater portion of

the population; because services and products are “cookie cutter,” consumers have the advantage of predicting the quality of the service and product that they will receive. However, this system also brings irrationalities. Since human

wants, needs and expectations are incredibly diverse, a business cannot begin to imagine the endless directions that a transaction can take. So, attempting to write procedures and protocols that allow for efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control may become too rigid and hinder good customer service. When employees are not empowered to think beyond the procedures, good customer service suffers.

continued on page 8



Cemetery staff were able to locate a gravesite from 1948 for a family member of the deceased. Assisting in this service were (left to rt.) Leah DeTommaso, Alfred Gonzales, Rose Mary Mastropolito, Mary Ann Magill and Scott Hicks.

Illinois Legislature Passes Cemetery Oversight Act

—submitted by Carol K. Giambalvo, M.A., CCCE, GC-C



On January 17, 2010, following months of investigation, arbitration, discussion, and political maneuvering, the State of Illinois passed a Law, to take effect March 1, 2010, that will impact all cemeteries in the land of Lincoln in some way. It is my belief, a belief shared by many of my colleagues, that other states will follow in the footsteps of Illinois with this type of Consumer Protection Legislation.

Religious cemeteries received a partial exemption in the bill. What does this mean? It means that we are required to comply with only certain sections of the Act, which are briefly explained below. First, it is important for all religious cemeteries in Illinois to know that **THEY MUST APPLY FOR THIS EXEMPTION. IT IS NOT AUTOMATIC.**

I URGE YOU TO:

1) Obtain a copy of *House Bill #1188* either through the Internet or by calling or writing the State of Illinois. The Bill is 230 pages in length.

2) Apply, because if you do not, you will be subject to the full Act.

Religious cemeteries must comply with:

Sec. 20-5(a) which requires cemeteries to be maintained reasonably, grass mowed, trees trimmed, garbage cleaned up, etc. The grave must be seeded as soon as possible, weather permitting;

Sec. 20-5(b) which states that the cemetery authority must have an overall map of the cemetery property, which shows all lots, plots, blocks, sections, avenues, walks, avenues, and paths, designations in the cemetery office or the cemetery's principal place of business;

Sec. 20-5(b-5) The cemetery must maintain an index that associates the identity of deceased persons interred, entombed, or inurned after the effective date of this Act with their respective place of interment, entombment, or inurnment;

Sec. 20-5(c) This map must be available for the public's inspection, and a copy of it, if practical, provided to them where interment rights are located, upon payment of reasonable photocopy fees. Any unsold lots, plots, etc. may be resurveyed and altered in shape or size and properly designated on the map, however, sold lots in which there are human remains may not be renumbered or renamed;

Sec. 20-5(d) states that a record must be kept of every interment, entombment and inurnment completed after the date of this Act. The record must include the deceased's age, date of burial, and parcel identification number identifying where the human remains are interred, entombed, or inurned. The record shall also include the unique personal identifier as may be further defined by rule, which is the parcel identification number in addition to the term of burial in years; the numbered level or depth in the grave, plot, crypt, or niche; and the year of death;

Sec. 20-6; a Cemetery Oversight Database, which will be certified by the Department within 9 months after the effective date of this Act. Upon certifying the database, all cemeteries, will be required to enter into the Cemetery Database, within 10 days after an interment, entombment, or inurnment of human remains, the record of such burial. This is also done for any relocation. This will be done via Internet, or alternative methods approved by the Department;

Sec. 20-8: Vehicle Traffic Control – Cemeteries must use its best efforts to ensure funeral processions entering and exiting cemetery grounds do not obstruct traffic on any street for a period in excess of 10 minutes;

Sec. 20-10: Contract: At the time cemetery arrangements are made, and prior to rendering the cemetery services a cemetery authority shall create a written contract to be provided to the consumer, signed by both parties, that shall contain: contact information, date of arrangements, price of service selected, and services and merchandise included for that price, the supplemental items of service and merchandise requested and individual prices, the terms or method of payment agreed upon and a statement of monetary advances made on behalf of the family. The cemetery shall maintain a copy of such written contract in its permanent records;

Sec. 20-11: Contact Information in a contract: In the contract mentioned above, the name, address and telephone number of the cemetery manager must be included;

Section 20-12: No cemetery authority shall require payment by cash only;

Sec. 20-30: The cemetery must conspicuously post signs supplied by the Department in English and Spanish that contain the Department's consumer hotline number, information on how to file a complaint, and whatever other information that the Department deems appropriate;

Sec. 25-3: This section explains how the cemeteries who have a partial exemption will submit to an investigation and mediation procedure following a complaint filed against them;

Sec. 25-120 is a Whistleblower Protection Clause for employees of Cemeteries.

All cemeteries are also included in Article 35 of the Act, *The Consumer Bill of Rights*.

Section 35-10. Consumer privileges.

(a) The record required under this Section shall be open to public inspection consistent with State and federal law. The cemetery authority shall make available, consistent with State and federal law, a true copy of the record upon written request and payment of reasonable copy costs. At the time of the interment, entombment, or inurnment, the cemetery authority shall provide the record of the deceased's name and date of burial to the person who would have authority to dispose of the decedent's remains under the Disposition of Remains Act.

(b) Consumers have the right to purchase merchandise or services directly from the cemetery authority when available or through a third-party vendor of the consumer's choice without incurring a penalty or additional charge by the cemetery authority; provided, however, that consumers do not have the right to purchase types of merchandise that would violate applicable law or the cemetery authority's rules and regulations.

(c) Consumers have the right to complain to the cemetery authority or to the Department regarding cemetery-related products and services as well as issues with customer service, maintenance, or other cemetery activities. Complaints may be brought by a consumer or the consumer's agent appointed for that purpose.

Section 35-15. Cemetery duties.

(a) Prices for all cemetery-related products offered for sale by the cemetery authority must be disclosed to the consumer in writing on a standardized price list. Memorialization pricing may be disclosed in price ranges. The price list shall include the effective dates of the prices. The price list shall include not only the range of interment,

inurnment, and entombment rights, and the cost of extending the term of any term burial, but also any related merchandise or services offered by the cemetery authority. Charges for installation of markers, monuments, and vaults in cemeteries must be the same without regard to where the item is purchased.

A contract for the interment, inurnment, or entombment of human remains must be signed by both parties: the consumer and the cemetery authority or its representative. Before a contract is signed, the prices for the purchased services and merchandise must be disclosed on the contract and in plain language. If a contract is for a term burial, the term, the option to extend the term, and the subsequent disposition of the human remains post-term must be in bold print and discussed with the consumer. Any contract for the sale of a burial plot, when designated, must disclose the exact location of the burial plot based on the survey of the cemetery map or plat on file with the cemetery authority.

(c) A cemetery authority that has the legal right to extend a term burial shall, prior to disinterment, provide the family or other authorized agent under the Disposition of Remains Act the opportunity to extend the term of a term burial for the cost as stated on the cemetery authority's current price list. Regardless of whether the family or other authorized agent chooses to extend the term burial, the cemetery authority shall, prior to disinterment, provide notice to the family or other authorized agent

under the Disposition of Remains Act of the cemetery authority's intention to disinter the remains and to inter different human remains in that space.

(d) If any rules or regulations, including the operational or maintenance requirements, of a cemetery change after the date a contract is signed for the purchase of cemetery-related or funeral-related products or services, the cemetery may not require the consumer, purchaser, or such individual's relative or representative to purchase any merchandise or service not included in the original contract or in the rules and regulations in existence when the contract was entered unless the purchase is reasonable or required to make the cemetery authority compliant with applicable law.

(e) No cemetery authority or its agent may engage in deceptive or unfair practices. The cemetery authority and its agents may not misrepresent legal or cemetery requirements.

(f) The Department may adopt rules regarding green burial certification, green cremation products and methods, and consumer education.

(g) The contractual requirements contained in this Section only apply to contracts executed after the effective date of this Act.

Carol K. Giambalvo, Director of Cemeteries, Diocese of Rockford, may be reached at 815.965.1450 or by email at ckg@rockfordcemeteries.org.



Draw on our Experience
Fine Artistry and Craftsmanship
Stained Glass • Faceted Glass
Mosaics • Sculpture • Cemetery Features
Stained Glass and Mosaicfront™ Niches
Conrad Pickel Studio, Inc.
7777 20th Street • Vero Beach, FL 32966
ph: 772-567-1710 • fax: 772-569-1485
e-mail: info@pickelstudio.com
website: www.pickelstudio.com