

# Cemeterians Who Wear Multiple Hats

— by Diane Gray



I began my career as the Manager of Oakwood Catholic Diocesan Cemetery, Traverse City, MI in March 1997.

What, you may ask, does one do when they are the manager of a small Diocesan Cemetery? That's easy to answer — everything!

Our cemetery had been run by a Board of Directors who were all in their 80's and 90's, so when Bishop Cooney was approached to take over the Cemetery I was awarded the position.

I soon found out what it meant to DO IT ALL!

The first thing I needed to do besides sell graves, headstones, bury the dead, and meet with families was walk the cemetery grounds and write down the information from every headstone.

Using hand drawn maps and the information and footage from past sextons and the local parishes everything was then put into the computer. A small cemetery you might say - well, *yes and no*. While we bury an average of 60 people a year - the cemetery has been here for over 150 years.

During that first summer we built our first mausoleum and columbarium, which added another dimension to my job - coordinating the building project.

Then there was the matter of getting ready for the dedication - Bishop Patrick Cooney S.T.D., S.T.L., was going to consecrate the new part of the cemetery. Grass had to be planted, irrigation put in, landscaping done - (not only in the new part but in the oldest sections too).

By the second summer we were ready for the formal consecration. You can imagine how much I learned “on the job” those first two summers.

Over the years I have been the “building contractor” for several other projects: a pump house, another mausoleum, 3 more columbariums, and a new office here in the cemetery.

I have hauled brush, and wood when we remove trees; planted flowers, and pulled weeds in our flower beds and the pots around the mausoleum.

As a cemetery manager, you must work with the priests, local funeral homes, monument companies, insurance companies, Social Services, the V.A., and most importantly, the grieving families.

I meet with each family at least 48 hours before burial takes place. I attend each burial, help to lower the casket in the presence of the family and help set the vault lid after the family leaves.

And of course, there is the office work, keeping within your budget, entering all burials, sales and payments into the computer, making sure mailings, agendas, and minutes go out to the Board, and answering the telephone, helping all those who come to you.

The Diocese of Gaylord, Fr. Wayne Dziekan, director of Peace and Justice and Fr. Duayne Wachowiak, director of Liturgy, and I have collaborated and published a pamphlet to inform the Catholic faithful and funeral homes of the “*Directives for Catholic Burial*.” Fr. Wayne and I have traveled all around the Diocese giving presentations on Catholic Burial at the parishes.

Recently when the director of Catholic Cemeteries for the Diocese of Gaylord retired, Bishop Hebda rewarded me with that position.

A big job? Yes, but the most rewarding job I have ever held. Doing the work the Lord has called us to do brings unlimited blessings.

My most important role is listening, and then helping the families celebrate their loved one's life in the most beautiful way possible, the way outlined by the Church.

Our Catholic Cemeteries and the people who work in them help bring peace to the grieving families, and to those who are about to die; we are here to serve God's People.

Diane Gray is director of Catholic Cemeteries, Diocese of Gaylord and was also appointed as Diocesan Delegate in 2011 from that location. She may be reached at 231.947.7921 or by email at [cemetery@oakwoodcatholic.org](mailto:cemetery@oakwoodcatholic.org).

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# New Year's Resolutions for Cemeterians Who Use (or want to use) Computers

— submitted by Peter Ryan, CCCE

## Beginners

1. Open a professional Face Book page for your cemetery using your work email address. *Be seen. Be heard!*
2. Video conference with one staff member using “Skype” a free video chat service. *Be Green - save gas commute via the internet for your meeting!*
3. Attend this year’s JCU session on “Technology in Cemeteries.” *Show your support. Take on a new or renewed interest!*

## For Advancement

1. Use Windows Movie Maker. Gather your very best cemetery photos and arrange them for a video presentation. Add video effects such as animation and set to music. Publish it on You Tube. Put a link to the video on your cemetery site. *Promote Your Image.*
2. Contact Pay Pal. Learn about their discounted monthly service fees for nonprofit organizations that use their services. Enroll. Open an account. Have Pay Pal embedded into your Website. *Sell and Grow!*
3. Blog — Can you create and maintain a BLOG for your cemetery and its members? Blogs can be for general on-going topics or to cover a particular event. *Interact and build relationships!*

## For Geeks (or Wanna-Be-Geeks)

1. Review VNC Single Click. Download the appropriate version. Compile and customize your help desk support. Upload

your file to their Website to create your executable. Embed the file in a secret place on your Website. Start your PC’s VNC listener mode. You’ve just created the ability for anyone that you tell: Go to the Website; click where you tell them which connects their computer to your designated computer. This allows support to PC from PC. Use to train someone, assist with resolving a PC problem; use to show them what you can do remotely. *Even the geeks in tech service will be impressed if you use this feature!*

2. SQL Query Commands - Find out how to open and query a database table (or tables). Try to review raw data. Look for things no one else thinks of (errors): a burial date that pre-dates the opening date of your cemetery? Or, find a burial entered for the year 2712 - a typo error. Correct and find values that do not make sense. Look for data field commands to tally and compute.

For example - Tally the day of the week for each day and find out if Thursday or Monday was the busiest day of the week for burials. Find the frequency - most common surname in the cemetery or see how many prefer metal to wood caskets. The data can reveal which cemetery section had the most interments (in need of the most work or the least). *Even the geeks in marketing will be impressed if you use statistics to tell them what they should already know!*

3. Be the Next Super Geek — write an IPAD application for your maintenance work crew to use. Develop an automated process (update a kiosk automatically/programmatically). Eliminate the pause - the manipulation of data between systems. Think —Sync-Flow to Automation. *Even the geeks in accounting will be impressed if you make their life faster and easier!*

Can you provide *Catholic Cemetery* magazine with five IT tips for others to use? Let them know so they can include them in an upcoming issue of the magazine.

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# How Does the Catholic Cemeteries of Chicago Use Social Media?



— by Paul Hackiewicz

As social networking sites have come to the forefront of our society in the last few years, we have been keenly aware of the potential effect that it could have on how we reach people, and we have carefully considered how we can use it to enhance our ministry. We wanted our strategy to be forward thinking and address our needs now and into the future. As part of our research into the subject, we hosted a small focus group comprised of young adults who worked for the cemetery over the summer a few years ago. The group's discussion centered on how they use social media, what types of social media sites that they frequent, and the role that it plays in their decision making.

The focus group helped to confirm some of what we already suspected: of the “general” sites, most people are using Facebook (at least for now), Twitter has been losing ground steadily, and MySpace has been relegated into the dustbin of history. It is worth mentioning that since then Google has launched Google+, and while they have promised some great new features, they have yet to capture as large an audience as Facebook. We also found that while social media users will still use a conventional search engine (like Google,

Bing, or Yahoo) to research major decisions, more and more they are relying on the opinions of friends. The opinions that their friends have can be determined very efficiently through social media.

The aspect of social media that is so compelling — being able to interact with a large group of friends instantaneously — is also what makes it potentially dangerous when trying to safeguard the privacy of the individuals and respect the sanctity of the work that is entrusted to us.

We were faced with striking a delicate balance between trying to fulfill our ministry through educating those who would seek us out through various internet based media and giving the very best in terms of private, reverent service to the families and friends of those we bury.

We decided that the best way that we could go about this was to create a Facebook site that would be filled with contact and other general information and a collection of pictures of various sites of interest at each major cemetery, but that the site would be configured to



block the public from freely posting their comments. This was considered the best possible way that we could assist those who would look for us on Facebook, while still performing our core ministry with the utmost care and compassion. As the opportunity presents itself, we will also be customizing some of the other content that is already on our Website for posting to our Facebook site.

As the future unfolds and social media matures into an everyday feature of people's lives, our presence on Facebook will allow us to educate and inform people about the Catholic Cemeteries. For now, our Website ([www.CatholicCemeteriesChicago.org](http://www.CatholicCemeteriesChicago.org)) remains our primary communication channel on the internet for those seeking information.

The field of social media continues to change and redefine itself from a technological as well as a sociological standpoint, and the Catholic Cemeteries of Chicago will continue to re-evaluate how we can utilize it most effectively to help us to fulfill our ministry and enhance the service we provide while maintaining the high level of care that we have always provided.

## Additional Observations

An interesting aspect of Facebook for me in the cemetery business is that people are starting to use a person's wall (a personal page) to memorialize them post mortem. Facebook has a policy in place where once the family proves that the person is deceased they will leave the wall up indefinitely, in a locked down state. As a cemetery person, I wonder if this will somehow merge with their memorialization in the cemetery.

— Paul Hackiewicz

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# Haiti

## Two Years After

— by Robin Forestal



*This band provides music for every weekly funeral Mass offered by Fr. Rick in the remote cemetery. It is reminiscent of the music of New Orleans.*

Last week I attended the funeral of a friend and mentor. Several years ago, right before I moved to Haiti in 2008 to work with Fr. Rick Frechette, she had given me some wise counsel and advice about being a volunteer. While I was listening to the homily about the beautiful life of this woman and how she cared for children and the “least of my brothers,” my mind drifted back to the countless funerals I attended while I lived in Haiti.

Part of my time in Haiti included tagging alongside Fr. Rick and members of the St. Luke Foundation for Haiti team when they put the Mission of Tobit into action. The Mission of Tobit Program was started to help provide proper burials to the unclaimed/unnamed dead at the general hospital morgue.

This special act of mercy not only provides dignified burials but also provides jobs to young people who help with the various segments that make up this special program. When someone passes onto the next life in Haiti it is often an increased financial burden to the family that cannot take on another financial burden. As a result, many of the indigent deceased are left at the doors of the general hospital morgue.

Prior to the devastating earthquake in January 2010 and the outbreak of Cholera in October 2010, we would drive to the morgue of the general hospital every Thursday with about 30 coffins that were made out of paper mache and purchased from young men Fr. Rick employed specifically to make them. We also brought rosaries with us for each coffin – also purchased from someone employed specifically to make them. The following description of the morgue is not for the faint of heart.

The morgue is located inside the gates of the general hospital of Port au Prince and as the truck drives up to the building one can get a whiff of the stench.

Many people smoke menthol cigarettes to cover the smell to keep from retching. I opted for a surgical mask with some menthol under my nose. There is usually blood water running out the entrance door and that is because when a family member comes to collect their deceased relative the morgue employees find the body in one of the two freezers (which sometimes work) and literally have to drag it by the arms or legs down the hallway to the door for the family to identify it. It’s like nothing you will ever see in the U.S. There are no gurneys or white sheets, or body bags.

Most people in the U.S. will never see the morgue and at the very least we would never see the body of our deceased relative prior to the body being cleaned. In Haiti they don’t even take off the clothes, if they are torn or ripped or half-removed, they stay that way on the body.

There are two big walk-in freezers where the bodies are kept. When the door is opened there are bodies everywhere; on the floor, on shelves, and on top of others too. We always began with a prayer when the doors were opened and then the singing of songs to the Blessed Virgin Mary began and would last until we were through – typically a few hours.

We would bring the coffins into the hallway, lay one down in front of the door and begin passing the bodies of babies and children along from the freezer, placing 20 at a time into each coffin. I was often the only girl so I was given the job of placing a rosary in the coffin and placing the paper burial shrouds on top before closing the coffin. Another group, the “pallbearers,” would take the coffin out to the truck to load it. When the coffins were all used and the trucks were full we headed out to the cemetery in country for the burial service.

The first time I participated, I was kind of in a daze watching the babies and children because they look like little dolls. Some of them were really grotesque, you could tell they were not taken care of in life and certainly not in death at the morgue either, or they were really sick and just dropped off outside the morgue doors. Some of them were actually wrapped in a bag or in a box, some of them looked like a surgical procedure gone wrong.