

“True to our calling ... We continue our efforts to preserve and nurture God’s creation ...”

- Unity in Diversity #40

As Franciscans we recognize the beauty and oneness of all creation knowing that our actions affect everyone and everything.

In keeping with this commitment, FSPA has provided the opportunity for our sisters to choose burial in an earth-friendly manner — natural burial — in a natural burial cemetery developed on FSPA land at St. Joseph Ridge in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The natural burial cemetery, a place of burial for FSPA only, honors the sacredness of our Sister Earth as well as the natural cycle of life and death.

With commitment to eternal care for all creation, many sisters have chosen to be honored in death with natural burial. Karolyne Rohlik, Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, chose natural burial and shared this reflection before her passing in 2020.

“The earth is sacred; our bodies are sacred. Every time I pass by the cemetery I think ‘this is where I’m going to be!’ You can’t get any more sacred than that.”

Additional Resources

FSPA Ecological Advocacy:
fspa.org/ecologicaladvocacy

Green Burial Council:
greencouncil.org

*“Praised be you, my Lord,
through our Sister Mother Earth,
Who sustains us ...”*

- Francis of Assisi



Franciscan Sisters
of Perpetual Adoration

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**FSPA
Natural Burial**

Perpetual Stewards of the Earth

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**Natural Burial Cemetery
FSPA Land at St. Joseph Ridge**

What is natural burial?

Natural burial is a respectful returning of our bodies to the earth at the end of life with minimal environmental impact. Without embalment, bodies are placed in biodegradable containers that are buried in the ground without concrete grave liners.

With natural burial, we are:

- Reducing our carbon footprint.
- Restoring and preserving the land's natural prairie habitat.
- Carrying out our ministry of integral ecology.
- Providing a model of sustainability for the global community including our volunteers, visitors and students — future stewards of the earth.
- Living Pope Francis' "Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home" and meeting goals of the Laudato Si' Action Platform that call us to respond to the cry of the earth, ecological education and adoption of simple lifestyles.

FSPA's story of sacred sustainability with natural burial

"The earth has nourished me all these years. It is now time to return that nourishment to the earth with my body."

These words were spoken by Sister Helen Gohres to Sister Sharon Berger in 2007. Sister Sharon, who had just returned from an energy fair that offered information about the establishment of natural preserves with space for green burials, recounted some of her experience to Sister Helen. Then 89 years old, Sister Helen shared her wish to be buried "in a simple way," without embalming or a traditional coffin. "Sister Helen was an advocate of environmental concerns and justice and peace issues much of her life," said Sister Sharon, "and told me that a natural burial was exactly what she wanted."

This conversation led to a two-year process of establishing the FSPA natural burial cemetery, which was approved by the La Crosse County Board in 2009 — the first of its kind in the county.

Fourteen circles with six graves in each were plotted on the 1.36-acre site at St. Joseph Ridge.

One year later, Sister Helen became the first FSPA laid to rest in this natural burial cemetery on FSPA property. Her body was gently cared for, dressed in a simple garment and placed in a biodegradable wooden container for visitation and funeral. Within 72 hours, Sister Helen was buried just as she wanted to be.

Today the land is being restored to natural prairie grasses and flowers, and sisters continue to choose natural burial there — honoring the sacredness of our Sister Earth and the natural cycle of life and death.



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