

# Bishop blesses new cemetery at Harrison

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



HARRISON — It took more than two years of work, but Mary Mother of God Church in Harrison finally has a Catholic cemetery, and Bishop Anthony B. Taylor blessed the site following Mass Sept. 25.

Located on the church grounds, the cemetery has been allotted 1 1/4 acres of the 20-acre property, explained Tom Jamison, a parishioner who's been heavily involved in the project. He and another parishioner, Tom Hoberock, recalled that former pastor Father Gregory Hart had wanted to reserve about 400 plots in an already existing cemetery neighboring the church for a Catholic section in a Protestant cemetery.

"We talked him out of that," Jamison said.

It wasn't an easy project, however, as regulatory approval was required at several government levels in the city and state, including the Health Department, Hoberock said, and many of the regulators hadn't been involved in projects for an entirely new cemetery. Even the Diocese of Little Rock "requires quite a bit of hoops to go through," he added.

Jim Driedric, property services manager for the diocese, said columbaria have become more common for churches to build. It was the first time he has worked with a church to establish a cemetery since he began working for the diocese nine years ago.

"It is more involved than a columbarium because of the (issues related to the) remains," he said, referring to the canonical and health department questions that need to be addressed.

The church will retain responsibility for maintaining the area, which is not set up as a perpetual care cemetery, Hoberock said. He explained that commercial perpetual care cemeteries are subject to even more legal requirements, including annual audits of a reserve fund to cover the expense.

The parish originally considered building a mausoleum, but that was eventually rejected as not being feasible and a columbarium was also rejected, Hoberock said. But to accommodate people who may wish to be cremated, the cemetery covenants allow for burying the cremains of up to three people in a plot.

Jamison said of the 96 plots already established, 34 have been sold but no one has yet been

buried on the grounds. Sales are limited to parishioners and at least one person in each family must be Catholic. Plots sell for \$500 each or four for \$450.

"It will take a hundred years to fill it up," Jamison said about the cemetery.

Father Hart is currently on sabbatical and upon his return in December he will be reassigned to St. Joseph Parish in Tontitown. Father Jim Fanrak is the new parish priest at Mary Mother of God Church and Bishop Taylor officially installed him at Mass just before the cemetery blessing.