

Statement of the Missouri Catholic Conference on the Disposition of Human Remains Through Alkaline Hydrolysis

We, the Catholic Bishops of Missouri, issue this statement to express our opposition to the legal recognition and use of alkaline hydrolysis as a means of disposing of human remains since it fails to fully respect the dignity that is owed to the deceased.

Every human person has an innate dignity that calls for the utmost respect of the body both in life and in death. Reverence and respect for the human remains of those who have died has been, and should remain, a guiding principle for the proper disposal of these remains.

Our Catholic faith informs us that we are made in the image of God and that our human bodies share in the dignity of this image (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶ 364). Respect for human dignity and the body is the reason the Catholic Church prohibits spreading the ashes of the deceased when a body is cremated.

Alkaline hydrolysis (referred to as aquamation or resomation) is a process wherein human remains are placed in a water-based solution under high temperature and pressure. The soft tissue is dissolved in the solution and the resulting effluent (around 100 gallons) is disposed of in the sewer system, while the bones are dried and pulverized into a white powder and are returned to the family. This is very different from cremation, where the entire remains from the cremation process may be respectfully interred in the earth or columbarium.

Some argue that this process is “greener” and more environmentally friendly than traditional cremation, which requires the burning of fossil fuels. However, alkaline hydrolysis results in altering the chemical composition of large amounts of clean water, an increasingly diminishing resource. The environmental impact on the water supply from a large scale use of this process may in practicality offset any purported “green” benefit, not to mention the added strain it would place on municipal water treatment facilities.

While the process of alkaline hydrolysis may not be intrinsically wrong, we believe it fails to show due reverence and respect for the human remains of the deceased by subjecting the dissolved human remains to being flushed into the sewer system. Apart from a situation of dire need, such as a public health emergency, we oppose the use of this process and call upon the Catholic faithful to reject its use.

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