

First United Methodist Church hosts columbarium dedication

On Oct. 5, a light breeze whispered past congregants arrayed in front of Franklin First United Methodist Church who had gathered to celebrate the dedication of their new columbarium and witness the inurnment of Frances Guy. Reverends Dana McKim and Margaret Freeman officiated from behind a simple wooden podium in white vestments, marking a new chapter for the church.

“There have been no burials in our cemetery since 1996, so we are very proud and honored to be able to offer this opportunity to First United Methodist Church members and the surrounding community,” said Chairman of Trustees Grant Oxendine. “We are also grateful to see the work of so many who began this mission over 20 years ago come to fruition.”

The church cemetery was established in 1831, serving as a final resting place for area Methodists for more than 160 years. By the 90s, it became obvious to church leadership that there was no space for future burials. So, the board of trustees began looking for alternatives that could be placed on church grounds. In 2003, a columbarium project showed promise.

Cremation has surpassed embalming as the preferred method for honoring loved ones in the U.S.: [according to the Cremation Association of North America](#), the percentage of people who chose cremation reached 61.8% in 2024. As a scalable, above-ground structure that houses urns inside individual, sealed niches, a columbarium seemed like a long-term, tailor-fit solution. However, progress stalled due to challenges presented by constructing an accessible location in the cemetery.

Years later, an offhand conversation between church leaders provided the way forward. They reasoned that placing a columbarium near the church entrance would provide families of the departed a dignified, contemplative location for honoring loved ones. So, they settled on a spot centered beneath the three stained-glass windows facing Harrison Avenue.

During this decades-long process, Frances continued to be a steadfast advocate for the church columbarium. Despite being unable to see its completion, Frances’ family was present when the church honored her as the first person inurned. Throughout the service, speakers noted that the project became a reality in no small part due to her persistence.

“We are so thankful that the columbarium project—after more than 20 years—has finally come to fruition,” said Associate Pastor Vicki Lawrence after the service. “And how appropriate that one of our driving forces is the first to be inurned, Frances Guy! We look forward to meeting the needs of the community and the church.”

The Franklin First United Methodist Church columbarium is framed in stonework and surrounded by hardscape, exterior lighting, and a garden by Luke Smith, owner of Highlander Roofing and member of the board of trustees. The face of the columbarium features four rows of customizable granite nameplates for niches, each capable of holding two urns, that will soon be available for reservation by the public, with more information to come in November.