

# Two pursue roles as home funeral guides

By Jim Fitzpatrick and Steve Nicely  
FCA-GKC board members

One talent lacking in our region has been someone qualified to help families conduct home funerals. So it was welcome news when we learned of two women who are pursuing that calling, **Sarah Crews** of Salina, KS., and **Joyce Thompson** of Columbia, MO. Both live within a few hours of Kansas City.

**Sarah Crews**, 51, is a singer and songwriter who worked as a music caregiver and bereavement counselor for hospice. Her bachelor's degree is in aging and end-of-life care, and she has a master's degree in end-of-life spiritual care. She is a member of the National Home Funeral Alliance, a non-profit organization that provides education to communities and families about in-home, after-death care. She has received NHFA's training.

She moved to Salina from Prescott, AZ, last fall with her husband, Tim, who accepted a job as research director at The Land Institute, a research, education and policy organization dedicated to sustainable agriculture. She is working with the Land Institute to establish a conservation natural burial cemetery on the prairie near Salina.

As it is, we know of only three cemeteries in Kansas and Missouri that offer green-burial options to the general public. They are Oak Hill Cemetery in Lawrence, Mount Muncie Cemetery in Lansing and Green Acres Cemetery near Columbia. For more information, see our website.

Sarah said her years of hospice work sparked her interest in home funerals and green burial. "I feel very strongly that this is the vocation my professional work has led me to."

**Joyce Thompson:** Instead of retiring at age 65, Joyce is adding home funeral guidance to the list of services she offers to families dealing with death and bereavement. Her background in respiratory rehabilitation, funeral directing, hospice bereavement and as a life coach specializing in end-of-



Joyce Thompson



Sarah Crews

life choices equip her for this new role, she says. A member of the National Home Funeral Alliance, she recently advised a family on how to prepare the body of a member and accomplish a natural burial. (see story on page 1)

The Civil War ushered in the era of embalming and practices that have distanced families from hands-on body preparation and burial,

she said. Home funerals appeal to those seeking more involvement, greater simplicity and an earth-friendly alternative, she said. But the services of funeral directors will still be needed when families choose the middle road of partial involvement.

Joyce Thompson and Sarah Crews bring impressive credentials to this new field. They are researching state laws and making connections, as they did with FCA-GKC. They have not finalized pricing for their services. FCA-GKC welcomes them and wishes them success.

Contact Sarah in Salina at 785-404-3214. Contact Joyce in Columbia at 573-355-6250.

☘ ☘ ☘

---

## Catholics revisit natural burial

By Steve Nicely  
FCA-GKC board member

Catholic Cemeteries of Northeast Kansas is reconsidering whether to offer natural burial at one of its six cemeteries in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties at the request of Archbishop Joseph Naumann. The Catholic Cemeteries advisory board looked at the possibility in 2011 at the urging of FCA-GKC, but did not change its policy of requiring grave liners (vaults) in its cemeteries.

In an email April 16, Catholic Cemeteries Executive Director Robert Chenoweth wrote: "We are looking into Wichita, Lawrence and other "green" programs and will discuss the matter in our next meeting in early May. Following that, we will report back to the Archbishop as to our recommendation."

Natural burial involves burial in a shroud or biodegradable container without a grave liner and without embalming. Such graves require added maintenance due to settling of the mound of fill dirt compared with the common practice of packing the

dirt and leveling when vaults are used. It also is less profitable.

The Catholic Diocese of Wichita offers natural burial in one of its cemeteries. The city-owned Oak Hill Cemetery in Lawrence and Mount Muncie Cemetery in Lansing also have sections reserved for natural burial. None of the other 64 cemeteries open to the public in the Kansas City area offers it.

The issue surfaced in March at the funeral of Rev. Richard Wempe, a priest in Naumann's diocese. Rev. Al Rockers delivered the eulogy, explaining, "He named three possibilities for his burial place --- cemeteries at Holy Family in Alma, St. Michaels in Wheaton and at Shantivanam (near Easton.) Three quiet, isolated places on the edges of our archdiocese where there would NOT be a requirement for a concrete vault. He wanted to be buried on a board, lowered into an open grave and let Mother Earth have his body back."

Fr. Wempe's body is buried in the cemetery at Alma.

☘ ☘ ☘