



# Foundation Document Overview

## Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site

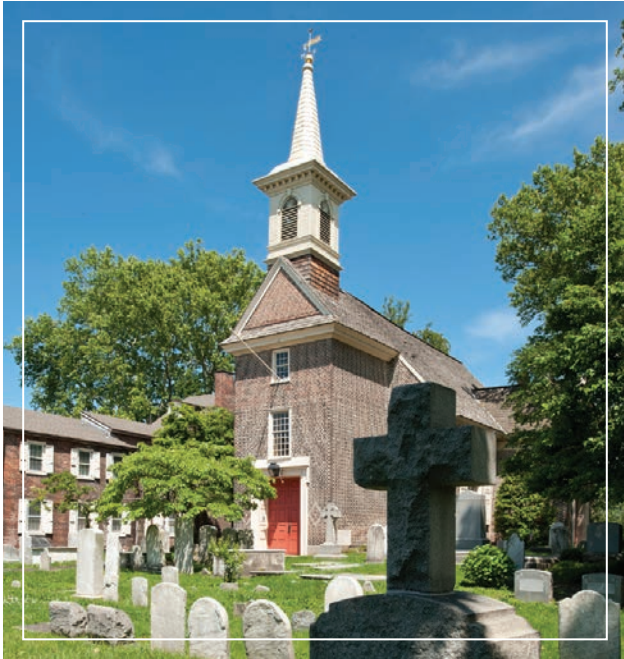
Pennsylvania



### Contact Information

For more information about the *Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: [inde\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:inde_superintendent@nps.gov) or (215) 597-7120 or write to:  
Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park and Associated National Historic Sites and Memorials  
143 S. 3rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106

## Purpose



*GLORIA DEI CHURCH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE provides a dignified landscape setting for the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

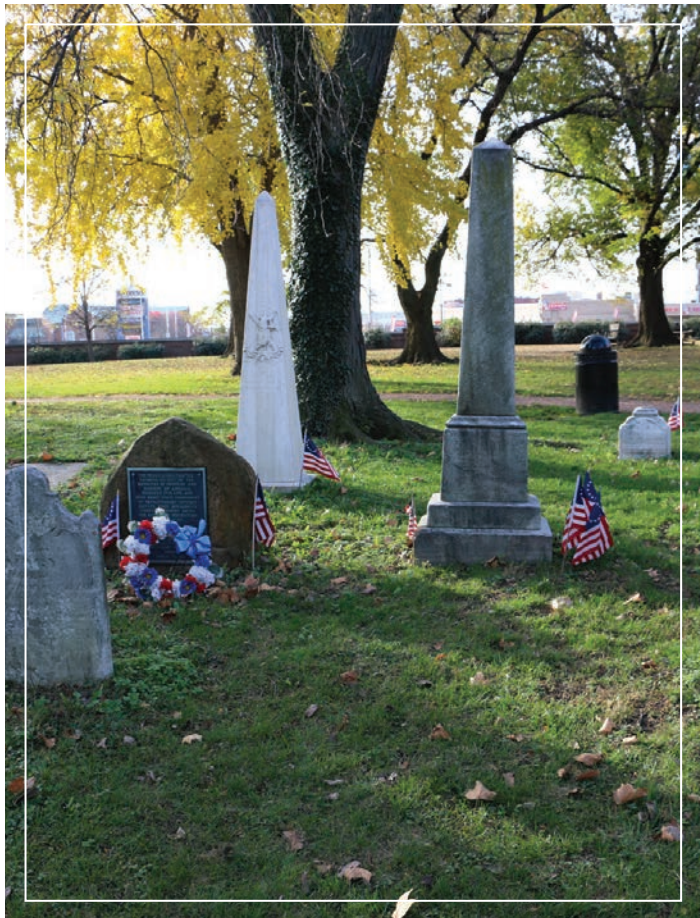
- **Relationship to the Church:** Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site frames Old Swedes' Church, one of the oldest active churches in North America and the oldest church in the state of Pennsylvania.
- **Historic Preservation:** Created in order to provide a fitting setting for Old Swedes' Church, Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site illustrates early historic preservation efforts in America.
- **A Place of Remembrance:** Because of the graveyard next to the church, burial markers from the nearby graves of Revolutionary War officers were relocated to Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site in the early 1950s. Today, these cenotaphs honor the memory of these patriots.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Dignified Landscape:** Designated as a national historic site in 1942, the landscape associated with the Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site consists of 2.61 acres adjacent to the Old Swedes' Church and cemetery. The landscape is bounded by Delaware Avenue, Washington Avenue, Water Street, and Christian Street. A mixture of evergreens and deciduous plants create a park-like setting on the landscape. Other key landscape features include masonry walls surrounding the church, cemetery, and grounds, as well as metal gates. A collection of relocated cenotaphs and burial markers can also be found on this landscape and contribute to the dignified open setting at Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site.



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Theme 3 – E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many, One**  
The motto E Pluribus Unum, meaning “out of many, one,” illustrates a distinctive characteristic of the United States—a democratic nation of many states and diverse people with different cultures, beliefs, and political ideas—that contributes to the dynamic tension and growth of American society.



## Description

Designated as a national historic site in 1942, the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church provides an opportunity to explore more than 300 years of religious freedom in America and the area's connections to early Swedish settlement. Today, the historic church and its grounds is an in-holding surrounded by federal land authorized by Congress in 1958. Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site sits at 916 South Swanson Street and is managed by the National Park Service through Independence National Historical Park. The national historic site includes the Gloria Dei Church and supporting buildings, the church cemetery, and a park. Although most of the site is in private ownership, the National Park Service does own the park area surrounding Gloria Dei Church in order to provide an appropriate setting for this national historic site. Still an active congregation, religious ceremonies and other special events may limit access to the interior of the historic church at times.

Also known as Old Swedes' Church, Gloria Dei Church offers an opportunity to interpret the intricacies of European colonization in Pennsylvania. Gloria Dei was a Lutheran church established during the years the lower Delaware Valley was a Swedish colony. New Sweden flourished from 1638 to 1655 when the area was incorporated into the Dutch New Netherlands until Penn's arrival in 1682. Although the present church was consecrated in 1700, the Gloria Dei congregation traces its history as far back as 1646. It remained a Lutheran congregation until 1831 and has been an Episcopal church since 1845. The extensive population of Swedes and Finns remaining in the area assimilated into the larger Philadelphia society. Many descendants of the original Lutheran congregants still celebrate Swedish customs at the church and the interior of the church houses many artifacts reflecting its Swedish heritage. Independence National Historical Park works collaboratively with the congregation and local stakeholders on the stewardship and interpretation of Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site.

