St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Memorial Garden Guidelines

A Place of Christian Burial and Remembrance

1. Purpose and Vision

The Memorial Garden of St. Peter's Episcopal Church is a sacred place set apart for the interment of cremated human remains and for prayerful remembrance of those who have died. The Garden is an extension of the church's ministry of burial. In keeping with the Christian hope of resurrection, those whose cremated remains are interred here are entrusted to God and to the earth from which all humanity comes.

The Garden is intended to be:

- a place of Christian burial;
- a place of prayer, remembrance, and quiet;
- a visible expression of the communion of saints;
- a place that connects the present congregation with generations of those who have gone before us; and
- a landscape compatible with the historic character, architecture, and mission of St. Peter's Episcopal Church and its setting in downtown Lewes.

The Memorial Garden is not intended to function as a conventional cemetery with individual monuments or private family plots. It is a shared sacred space in which the names and lives of individuals are remembered within the larger life and worship of the Christian community.

2. Nature of the Interment

The Memorial Garden is intended solely for the interment of cremated human remains.

Cremated remains shall be committed directly to the earth. **Urns, permanent containers, boxes, or other vessels shall not be permanently interred in the Garden.**

The Church may establish appropriate procedures for preparing and placing cremated remains in the earth in a manner that protects both the dignity of the remains and the long-term integrity of the Garden.

No non-biodegradable objects, personal mementos, photographs, jewelry, clothing, containers, or other objects shall be buried with the cremated remains unless specifically approved by the Rector.

3. Eligibility for Interment

Interment in the Memorial Garden ordinarily shall be available to:

1. members of St. Peter's Episcopal Church;
2. members of the immediate families of members of St. Peter's;
3. former members of St. Peter's; and
4. others whose lives have been significantly connected with the ministry and community of St. Peter's, at the discretion of the Rector.

The Church may establish different categories of eligibility and associated fees as appropriate. Interment is a privilege of the Church and does not constitute a conveyance of ownership or a perpetual right to a particular portion of the Garden.

4. Christian Burial

All interments shall be conducted in accordance with the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church and the policies of the Diocese of Delaware.

Whenever possible, the interment of cremated remains shall include the appropriate prayers from the Book of Common Prayer and may take place as part of a funeral, memorial service, or separate service of committal.

The Rector, or another member of the clergy authorized by the Rector, shall ordinarily preside at the service of committal.

The Church recognizes that families may have particular customs and wishes surrounding death and remembrance. Requests for variations from the normal service should be discussed with the Rector in advance of purchase.

5. Individual Graves

Because the Garden is intended to emphasize our common life in Christ rather than individual ownership, individual grave plots shall not be visibly marked.

The Church shall maintain a record of all who are interred in the Memorial Garden and make reasonable provision for the preservation of these records so that future generations can identify those whose remains are interred in the Garden.

6. Memorialization

To preserve the beauty, simplicity, and historic character of the property, individual headstones, plaques, statues, crosses, benches, photographs, or other permanent memorial objects shall not be permitted within the Garden.

Instead, the Church may establish one or more common memorials upon which the names of those interred may be recorded.

The form, material, location, typography, and inscription of any common memorial shall be approved by the Rector or Vestry and, where appropriate, by any governmental or historic-preservation authority having jurisdiction. The Church will establish a standard inscription.

7. Flowers and Personal Remembrances

Natural small flower arrangements may be placed in the Garden in connection with a funeral, memorial service, or anniversary. Because the Garden is a shared sacred landscape, permanent displays artificial floral arrangements and individual memorial decorations are not permitted.

The following shall not be placed in the Garden without specific permission:

- artificial flowers;
- balloons;
- candles or open flames;
- food or beverages;
- photographs or framed objects;
- flags or political materials;
- statues or figurines;
- electronic candles or other battery powered objects
- permanent ornaments; or
- other objects inconsistent with the character of the Garden.

The Church reserves the right to remove flowers or temporary objects when they have become unsightly, deteriorated, or inappropriate to the Garden.

8. Landscaping and Historic Character

The Memorial Garden shall be maintained as a garden rather than as a conventional cemetery. Only the Church may install natural flowers or plants.

Plantings will be selected with particular attention to:

- the historic character of St. Peter's;
- the architectural setting of the church;
- native and regionally appropriate plants;
- long-term maintenance requirements;
- environmental sustainability;
- accessibility; and
- the Garden's use as a place of prayer and reflection.

No individual may plant a tree, shrub, perennial, or other permanent vegetation in memory of a person without approval from the Church.

The Church shall determine the placement, species, and maintenance of all plantings.

Because St. Peter's is a historic property, any alteration to the landscape shall be undertaken with appropriate consideration of historic-preservation requirements and the possibility of archaeological resources.

9. Number and Capacity of Interments

The Church shall establish the maximum number of interments that can appropriately be accommodated within the Garden.

The Vestry may establish policies concerning the number of individuals whose remains may be interred in a particular area and whether multiple individuals may be interred together.

The Church shall not promise a particular location within the Garden unless the Vestry has expressly established such a system.

The Church may close the Garden to additional interments when available space has been exhausted or when continued interments would compromise the character, integrity, or appropriate use of the Garden.

10. Interment Procedures

Before an interment takes place, the Church shall receive appropriate documentation confirming the identity of the deceased and authorization for the disposition of the cremated remains.

The Church shall maintain a permanent record containing, at minimum:

- full legal name of the deceased;
- date of birth, when available;
- date of death;
- date of interment;
- relationship to St. Peter's;
- name of the person authorizing the interment;
- such additional information as may be required by law or Church policy.

The Church shall establish procedures for receiving, identifying, transporting, and temporarily holding cremated remains before interment.

The cremated remains shall remain in the custody of the authorized family member, funeral home, or Church according to procedures established by the Church until the time of committal.

11. Responsibility for the Garden

The Vestry shall have ultimate responsibility for the Memorial Garden.

The Vestry may delegate day-to-day oversight to the Parish Administrator, a Memorial Garden Committee, Buildings and Grounds Committee, or another designated body.

The Church shall be responsible for maintaining the Garden as a whole.

No family or individual shall have responsibility for or exclusive control over the maintenance of a particular location within the Garden.

12. Changes to the Garden

The Church reserves the right to alter, improve, landscape, or redesign portions of the Memorial Garden when reasonably necessary for:

- safety;
- accessibility;

- drainage;
- preservation of historic resources;
- maintenance;
- environmental stewardship;
- construction or repair of Church facilities; or
- the long-term integrity of the Garden.

The Church will make reasonable efforts to preserve the dignity of all interred remains and the memory of those whose remains are entrusted to the Garden.

No change shall be undertaken for convenience alone when a reasonable alternative exists that would preserve the Garden and its interments.

13. Relocation of Remains

The Church does not anticipate the relocation of cremated remains.

If circumstances require relocation, the Vestry shall establish an appropriate process consistent with applicable law, diocesan policy, pastoral considerations, and respect for the deceased and their families.

Any relocation shall be carefully documented in the Church's permanent records.

14. Fees and Contributions

The Vestry shall establish reasonable fees for interment and memorialization.

Fees may include costs associated with:

- preparation and administration;
- the service of committal;
- Garden maintenance;
- permanent recordkeeping;
- common memorial inscription; and
- long-term stewardship of the Garden.

The Church has an established Churchyard fund where the interment fee will be deposited so that the Garden does not become a financial burden upon future generations.

Fees shall not be understood as the purchase of a burial plot or as the purchase of ownership in any portion of the Church property.

15. Pastoral Considerations

The Memorial Garden exists first as a ministry of the Church, not as a source of revenue.

St. Peter's recognizes that the death of a loved one is a sacred and vulnerable time. Questions concerning interment shall therefore be handled with pastoral sensitivity and respect.

The Church will seek to ensure that families understand clearly:

- what interment in the Garden entails;
- that cremated remains will be committed directly to the earth;
- that no individual urn will remain at the site;
- how the deceased will be memorialized;
- what records the Church will maintain; and
- what rights and responsibilities accompany interment.

16. Respect for the Historic Churchyard

The Memorial Garden shall be understood as part of the continuing history of St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

The Garden should therefore communicate continuity rather than separation: the living Church gathered in worship, the generations who have served and worshiped at St. Peter's, those whose remains rest upon the property, and those who will come after us are all part of one communion.

The Church shall seek to preserve the historic character of the property while allowing the grounds to serve the pastoral needs of the present generation.

17. Final Authority

These guidelines shall be administered under the authority of the Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

The Vestry may amend these guidelines as circumstances, pastoral needs, diocesan policies, historic-preservation requirements, or applicable law change.

Questions not specifically addressed in these guidelines shall be resolved by the Vestry in consultation with the Rector and, when appropriate, the Diocese of Delaware and qualified legal or historic-preservation advisors.

A Final Word

The Memorial Garden is a place where we entrust our beloved dead to God.

Here, beneath the soil of a historic place of Christian worship, the Church gives thanks for lives received, grieves lives lost, remembers those who have gone before us, and bears witness to the hope that death is not the final word.

“Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”
—Romans 14:8

“Even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.”

May this Garden be a place of peace, remembrance, beauty, and hope for generations to come.