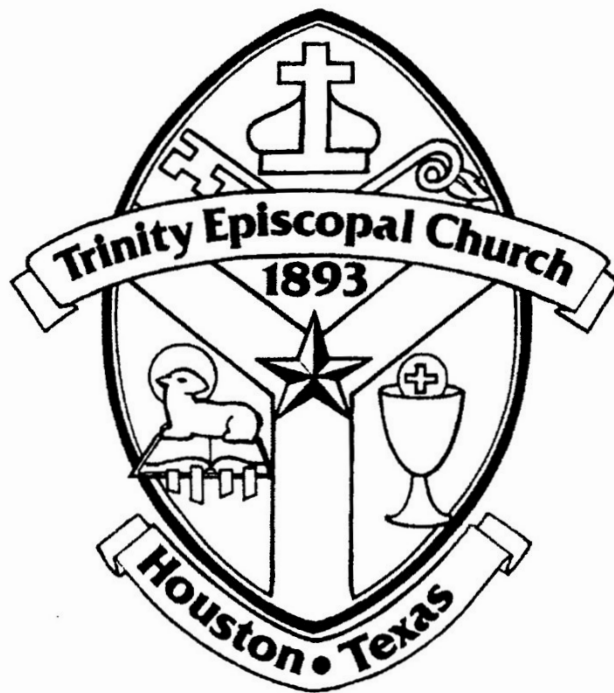


TIDINGS OF COMFORT

DECEMBER 20, 2023

6:00 p.m.



The Reverend Luz Cabrera Montes, Associate Rector
The Reverend Canon Dr. Henry L. Atkins, Jr.
Alex Jones, Organist and Choirmaster

***Making God's Presence Real
By Sharing Christ's Life-Changing Love***

WELCOME TO TRINITY CHURCH

Welcome to Trinity Episcopal Church! We're glad you chose to worship with us. In this leaflet, you'll find everything you need to follow along printed.

Whether you've been attending Trinity your whole life or this is your first time here, we invite you to participate in the service as fully as you feel comfortable doing.

If you're looking for a new church home, know that the Trinity family welcomes you. We would also appreciate your filling out a virtual visitors card, which can be accessed at this link:

<https://www.trinitymidtown.org/contact-card-page/>

For more information, please visit our website:

www.trinitymidtown.org

For questions about how to connect with us, please email
connections@trinitymidtown.org



VESTRY

Andy Durham, *Senior Warden*

John Escoto, *Junior Warden*

Eric Beam

Ben Blanding

Pam Lawson

Mary Matteucci

Ann McCoy

John Merullo

Samantha Rainman

Gladys Vallés

David Villarreal

Michele White

Teddy Adams, *Chancellor*

Dana Gannon, *Assistant Chancellor*

Larry Laubach, *Treasurer*

Steve Lee, *Assistant Treasurer*

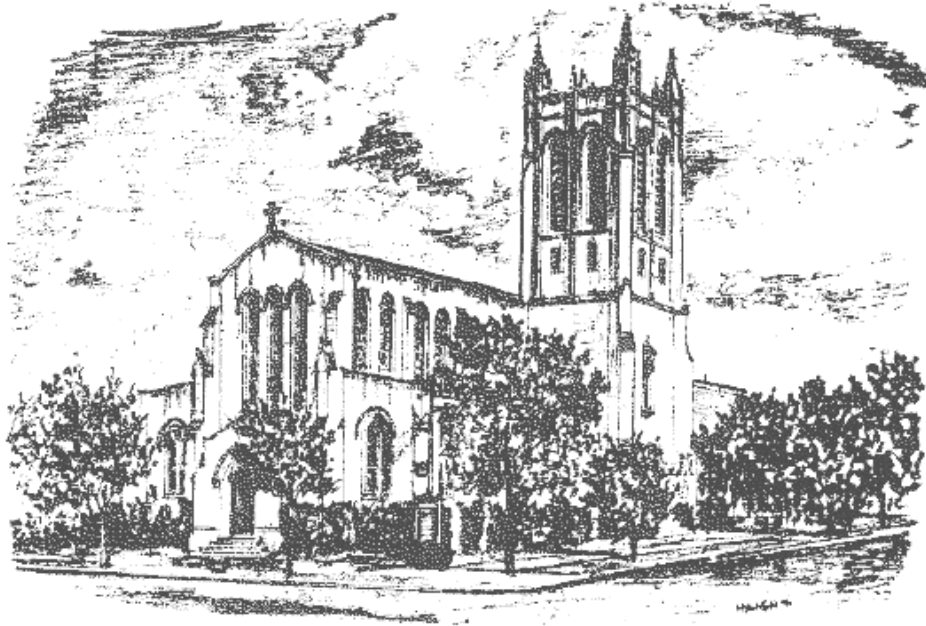
Ben Blanding, *Clerk of the Vestry*

Samantha Rainman, *Assistant Clerk of the Vestry*

SERVING TODAY

Lectors: Robert Feltenberger, Theresa McClellan, David Marsh, Norma Cooper,
Ron Mailloux, Shelby Bradley

Music: Alex Jones, piano



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THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

PRELUDE:

Still, Still, Still

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

People **The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.**

Leader In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

People **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to extinguish it.**

WORDS OF EXPLANATION

Leader Welcome to this "*Tidings of Comfort*" service. The name comes from the seasonal hymn, "O Tidings of Comfort and Joy!" It has also been known as Blues Christmas, or the Longest Night Service.

During this season in December, we experience the shortest day and the longest night of the year. But the name also applies to the feeling that a number of us have about this season. It is the "long dark night of the soul," "the winter of our discontent," in which memories of past experiences and the pain of present experiences can become overwhelming.

For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, Christmas Eve, or New Year's Eve, or the beginning of another New Year.

In this service, we will have some prayers appropriate to the heaviness season, recognizing that this is not necessarily a season of joy. We will invite you to meditate on the vulnerability, pain, and sorrow you may bring, and to offer it to the Christ child. And we trust that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone.

PIANO MEDITATION:

Savior of the nations, come

Nun komm, der Heiden Heilan

Savior of the nations, come!
Virgin's Son, make her your home.
Marvel now, both heaven and earth,
that the Lord chose such a birth.

Wondrous birth! Oh, wondrous child
of the Virgin undefiled!
Mighty God and Mary's son,
eager now his race to run!

Come, O Father's saving Son,
who o'er sin the victory won.
Boundless shall your kingdom be;
grant that we its glories see.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

Isaiah 40:1-2a, 26-31

Lector: *A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed...

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Lector: The Word of the Lord

All: **Thanks be to God.**

PIANO MEDITATION:

Comfort, comfort ye my people

Psalm 42

Comfort, comfort ye my people,
speak ye peace, thus with our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness
mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them;
tell her that her sins I cover,
and her warfare now is over.

Make ye straight what long was crooked,
make the rougher places plain;
let your hearts be true and humble,
as befits his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now o'er earth is shed abroad;
and all flesh shall see the token
that the word is never broken.

PSALM READING:

Psalm 22

Reader: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

ALL: O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer. And by night, but I find no rest.

Reader: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and You delivered them.

ALL: It was you who took me from the womb. You who kept me safe on my mother's breast. Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Reader: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

ALL: God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted. God does not hide from me. When I cry to God, God hears me. Thanks be to God!

PIANO MEDITATION:

O heavenly Word, eternal Light

O Heiland, reiss

O heavenly Word, eternal Light,
begotten of the Father's might,
who in these later days was born
for blessing to a world forlorn:

Pour light upon us from above,
and fire our hearts with ardent love,
that, as we hear thy truth today,
all wrong desires may burn away.

O let us not, for evil past,
be driven from thy face at last,
but with thy saints for ever more
behold thee, love thee, and adore.

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

SECOND READING

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Reflection: Jesus himself was no stranger to being a stranger, an outsider, a refugee.

Reader: We light this first candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.

ALL: May God's eternal love surround them.

Hymn 56, v. 6:

O come, O come, Emmanuel

Veni, veni Emmanuel

O come, thou Day - spring from on high, and cheer us
by thy draw - ing nigh; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds — of
night, and death's dark sha - dow put to flight. Re — joice! Re — joice!



Silence

THIRD READING

1 Kings 19:1-3a, 8-15a

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.'

Reflection: Sometimes it is only in isolation that we can hear the still small voice through which God speaks to us.

Reader: We light this second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to You, O God, asking that into our open hands, You will place the gift of peace.

ALL: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Hymn: 56, v. 2:

O come, O come, Emmanuel

Veni, veni Emmanuel

2 O come, thou Wis - dom from on high, who or - derest
all things might - i - ly; to us the path of know - ledge
show, and teach us in her ways to go. Re - joice! Re - joice!
Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

FOURTH READING

Luke 6:17-23

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.'

Reflection: This familiar passage reveals that Jesus was well aware of people's sorrows, yearnings, and suffering--and offered a promise of something different.

Reader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months and for some of us, years of down times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

ALL: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Hymn: 56, v. 3:

O come, O come, Emmanuel

Veni, veni Emmanuel

3 O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy
tribes on Si - nai's height in an - cient times didst give the
law, in cloud, and ma - jes - ty, and awe. Re— joice! Re— joice!
Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

FIFTH READING

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Reflection: When burdens get piled on top of other burdens, the load can crush us. In his promise, Jesus offers us help to carry our burdens and responsibilities.

Reader: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

ALL: Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

REFLECTION

The Reverend Canon Dr. Henry L. Atkins, Jr.

The Reverend Canon Dr. Henry L. Atkins, Jr. is a retired priest canonically resident in the Diocese of New Jersey. Canon Atkins is an honorary Canon of the Diocese of Costa Rica, a graduate of Randolph Macon College, The Virginia Theological Seminary and holds a doctorate from The Graduate Theological Foundation in Notre Dame, Indiana. In addition, he has done post graduate work at The Mexican American Cultural Center, Boston College and Oxford University.

Canon Atkins has served parishes in Costa Rica, Virginia, Indianapolis, the Dominican Republic, New Hampshire and Los Angeles. He has also worked on the staff of the Washington Cathedral and served as a member of the staff of the Bishop of Rochester, NY. Canon Atkins has also served as chaplain to the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Rutgers University and Dartmouth College. He has served as a member of the faculty at the University of North Carolina, Rutgers University, the General Theological Seminary and El Instituto Pastoral Hispano.

(Continued on page 10)

Canon Atkins has also served as a Theologian in Residence at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH and as a Martin Luther King Lecturer at Dartmouth College. Canon Atkins served for 6 years as the chairperson of the Episcopal Church's National Commission on Racism and for 8 years as vice-president of the Anglican/Episcopal Theological Education Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2010 Canon Atkins was presented the Hugh White Award for outstanding work in the field of economic justice by the Episcopal Church's National Commission on Economic Justice. He has published many articles in various journals and books including *The Witness Magazine*, *Sojourners*, and *The International Review of Mission*.

Canon Atkins was a founding member of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C. and worked for over 20 years as a facilitator and spiritual advisor for the Order of St. Helena. Canon Atkins also holds a Black Belt in kickboxing in the Kempo-International School of Martial Arts.

Hymn: 56, v. 7:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Veni, veni Emmanuel

O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind in one the
 hearts of all man - kind; bid thou our sad di - vi - sions
 cease, and be thy - self our King of peace. Re - joice! Re - joice!
 Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

Silence

AN ADVENT LITANY OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT

Reader: We wait in the darkness, expectantly, longingly, anxiously, thoughtfully. The darkness is our friend. In the darkness of the womb, we have all been nurtured and protected. In the darkness of the womb, the Christ-child was made ready for the journey into light.

ALL: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

Reader: It is only in the darkness that we can see the splendor of the universe—blankets of stars, the solitary glowings of distant planets. It was the darkness that allowed the magi to find the star that guided them to where the Christ-child lay.

ALL: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

Reader: In the darkness of the night, desert people find relief from the cruel relentless heat of the sun. In the blessed darkness, Mary and Joseph were able to flee with the infant Jesus to

safety in Egypt.

ALL: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

Reader: In the darkness of sleep, we are soothed and restored, healed and renewed. In the darkness of sleep, dreams rise up. God spoke to Jacob and Joseph through dreams. God is speaking still.

ALL: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

Reader: In the solitude of darkness, we sometimes remember those who need God's presence in a special way — the sick, the unemployed, the bereaved, the persecuted, the homeless; those who are demoralized and discouraged, those whose fear has turned to cynicism, those whose vulnerability has become bitterness. Sometimes in the darkness, we remember those who are near to our hearts — colleagues, partners, parents, children, neighbors, friends. We thank God for their presence, and ask God to bless and protect them in all that they do — at home, at school, as they travel, as they work, as they play.

ALL: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

Reader: Sometimes, in the solitude of darkness, our fears and concerns, our hopes and our visions rise to the surface. We come face to face with ourselves and with the road that lies ahead of us. And in that same darkness, we find companionship for the journey. In that same darkness, we sometimes allow ourselves to wonder and worry whether the human race is going to make it at all.

ALL: We know you are with us, O God, yet we still await your coming. In the darkness that contains both our hopelessness and our expectancy, we watch for a sign of God's Hope.

Amen.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Leader I invite all who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior and who seek to follow in his way and to live in unity with one another, to come to this table with reverence and with faith. Eat and drink for your strengthening, that you may grow in grace and be blessed, remembering that we, though many, are one body in Jesus Christ.

Leader Peace be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Leader Lift up your hearts.

People **We lift them up to the Lord.**

CONSECRATION

Leader Lord God, we set before you this holy supper, following the command of Jesus, who, the night in which he was betrayed, took bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is my body, broken for you." And on the same night, in the same way, he took a cup, and raised it, and poured it out for his disciples to drink, saying, "Drink of this cup, all of you. This is the new covenant, in my blood poured out for you."

Leader and people

In union with each other and with our Lord Jesus Christ , who gave himself for us and for the world, and in communion with the whole church, we offer ourselves to you.

Leader And now, as Jesus taught us, we say:

**All Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The minister takes the bread and breaks it, saying
The body of Christ, broken for you.

The minister raises the cup, saying
The blood of Christ, shed for you.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE ELEMENTS

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

**All For the bread we have eaten,
for the wine we have tasted,
for the life we have received,
we thank you, God.**

**Grant that what we have done
and have been given here
may put its mark upon us
and remain in our hearts,
so that we may mature as followers of Christ,
and may reveal our faith in our actions,
through Christ our Lord and our companion in life.
Amen.**

CAROL:

Silent night, holy night
The congregation is invited to sing, as able:

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light,
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

THE BLESSING

Leader The life our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and suffered and died
for the sake of all suffering and hurting humans, yesterday, today, and tomorrow;
the peace of God, which passes all understanding;
and the presence of God's Holy Spirit supporting and encouraging you,
be with you through this season of the longest night.

DISMISSAL Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE:

Hark! the glad sound! the Savior comes

Richmond

Hark! The glad sound! The Savior comes,
the Savior promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes, the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure;
and with the treasure of his grace
T' enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
thy welcome shall proclaim;
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with thy beloved Name.

A HISTORY OF TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Trinity Episcopal Church of Houston has existed as a house of worship and a center of its community for over a century. As such, it has adapted to the changing nature of the city, as Houston grew from a regional town of approximately 40,000 souls to a dynamic metropolitan giant, the fourth largest city in the United States. With a congregation that grew from a few founding members in the 1890s to several thousand parishioners at its peak, Trinity Church is an example of how spiritual people have contended with the challenges presented during a city's most crucial period of urban development.

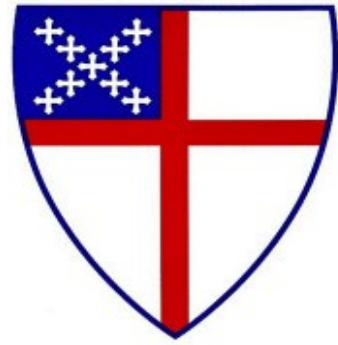
Founded in 1893 as a mission of Christ Church, Houston's first Episcopal church, Trinity is located southwest of downtown. After a quarter of a century of existence in wooden buildings, Trinity parish built its present imposing structure (1917 - 1921) in Houston's South End, at the corner of Main Street and Holman Avenue. That structure, designed by Ralph Adams Cram of Boston and William Ward Watkin of Houston became an architectural landmark constructed in the neo-Gothic style with Texas limestone and a 97 foot bell tower.

During the late 1910s and 1920s, Trinity entered an era of explosive growth, paralleling that of the city, and became an important center of the Episcopal faith. The congregation's many youth and adult activities were community events that attracted wide attention among the general populace. An integral part of its city, Trinity likewise maintained special relationships with Houstonians of other faiths. With a membership numbering 1,900 parishioners in 1930, Trinity emerged as the largest Episcopal parish in the Diocese of Texas and one of the largest in the nation.

After World War II, Houston's growth presented Trinity with perhaps its greatest challenge. As the city physically expanded into the new postwar suburbs, Trinity's membership began to decline. Rather than abandon its historic location, the congregation showed itself to be steadfast. Resurrecting itself from this period, Trinity reaffirmed its mission, this time as a beacon in the inner city where it has become a leading institution in the heart of Houston, determined to enhance the quality of urban life for everyone.

While our neighborhood has gone through many changes, the parish has remained steadfast, and actively ministers to a diverse congregation and to the poor in its midst. As the Midtown Houston neighborhood began redeveloping, starting in the early 2000s, Trinity Church has rededicated itself to its spiritual mission, and has become an active part of the Midtown area for music and other creative art expressions.





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