



Jazz Vespers

THEODICY JAZZ COLLECTIVE
with THE SANCTUARY CHOIR

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 | 7:00 P.M.



Theodicy Jazz Collective is the nation's foremost liturgically based jazz ensemble, having led services and workshops at venues such as Washington National Cathedral, Canterbury Cathedral, and Oxford and Yale universities. The Theodicy Jazz Collective was formed at Oberlin Conservatory in 2006 and grew during residency at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music from 2008 to 2012. The band creates and leads services for a multitude of churches. The ensemble incorporates sounds from the traditions of jazz and gospel music and rhythms from Latin America and Africa. Theodicy describes their music as "a constant prayer, sometimes a shout of joy, sometimes a call to action, sometimes a cry for hope."

Jazz Vespers

The Welcome

The Song

"Every Time I Feel the Spirit" | African American Spiritual/arr. Jonathan Parker
Theodicy Jazz Collective

The text of this song can be found on page 404 of The United Methodist Hymnal.

The Evening Prayer

The Hymn

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand" | Thomas A. Dorsey, 1932

Soloist

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light: take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Choir

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near, when my life is almost gone,

Hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall: take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Congregation

When the darkness appears and the night draws near, and the day is past and gone,

At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand: take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

The Scripture | Psalm 85:6-13; John 15:7-17

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

The Introduction to "Love is the Way"

Love Is the Way: A Freedom Suite

DEDICATED TO BISHOP MICHAEL CURRY

PART ONE: ROOTS

I. Love is the Way & Battle Hymn of the Republic

II. There is a Balm in Gilead

III. This Little Light of Mine

PART TWO: THE HOPE THAT INSPIRES (ROMERO, TUTU, KING)

IV. La Montaña

V. South African Alleluia

VI. World House

PART THREE: OUR PATH FORWARD: LOVE IS THE WAY

VII. Love Always

VIII. They'll Know we are Christians by Our Love

IX. Love is the way (Reprise)

Composer/Arranger: William Z. Cleary

Lyrics: Brandt Maina and Kyle Brooks | Executive Producer: Andrew K. Barnett

Creative Consultants: Jonathan Parker and Sarah Politz

The Blessing

Love Is the Way: A Freedom Suite composed by William Cleary and dedicated to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, is a three-part exploration of justice, hope, and love. The suite begins with **Roots**, a celebration of African American Spirituals and freedom songs like *Balm in Gilead* and *This Little Light of Mine*. **The Hope That Inspires** honors civil rights leaders such as Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King Jr., and **Our Path Forward - Love is the Way** calls for unselfish love as the guiding principle for humanity's future. This commission was supported by South Arts: Jazz Road, with funding provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mellon Foundation, and the Doris Duke Foundation. The piece was commissioned by the Hendrick's Chapel Choir, with gratitude to the Rev. Dr. Brian Konkol and Pippie Calvar.

Texts

Love is the way

Love is the way.

Glory! What is the Glory? Where is the light? Can we find justice? Will we find truth?

Glory! Truth marches on.

There is a Balm in Gilead

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged and deep is the pain. In prayers, the holy spirit revives my soul again.

If you can't pray like Peter, if you can't be like Paul, go home and tell your neighbor He died to save us all.

This little light of mine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Ev'rywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Esa montaña se movera.

Si tu vieras fe como un grano de mostaza eso lo dice el Señor. Tu le derias a la montaña muévete. Esa montaña se movera.

English translation: I tell you the truth, if you had faith, even if it were as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and the mountain would move.

Alleluia

Alleluia.

The World House Revisited

I once heard someone say that the great struggle of everyday life is learning how to live together without having to live alike. If you have ever shared a home with other people, you know what this means. We try to work our way toward a rhythm that makes sense. We make our house rules and norms and try to adapt as best we can. At least in theory. Because we all know plans are one thing and practice is another. Imagination has its place but at some point, we have to deal with concrete realities. Coexistence requires a negotiation of norms, boundaries, and practices. This is how we move from merely occupying a house to inhabiting a home.

I like to think this is something akin to what Martin Luther King Jr. Had in mind. This world is a house, and we are the inhabitants. People of every persuasion, every journey, every destiny – here, together. In the only home we have ever known. History has marked our failures to make this house a home for one another. The halls have been filled with hatred. The windows have been stained by the distortion of discrimination.

The floors soiled with the blood of the slaughtered. King is clear about this – the world has failed in its housekeeping. And the task is ours to make this house a home. We either live together or perish as fools.

King was a dreamer. You have to be if you want to see a better world. That kind of world exists in our hearts before it manifests in our hands.

But he knew something about nightmares, too. Harry Belafonte speaks of his last conversation with King. He was troubled in his soul. There was trembling in his spirit. He spoke of the long, hard struggle for freedom. But he also spoke of his fear – perhaps we have been integrating into a burning house. Greek mythology tells us Prometheus brought fire from the gods to humanity. History tells us humanity has set fire to the world. Humans have burned bridges, crosses, forests, bodies – all in the name of power. Dominance. Conquest. Eradication.

The world is ablaze. The house is on fire. The flames singe us and the smoke chokes us. The darkness envelops us and we stumble about for an exit. But there is no escape. Some dream of colonizing other worlds, but the moon can't save us. Spaceships cannot carry us at light speed away from the failure of moral vision. Rockets will not blast us beyond our historical memory. Wherever we go, we are still human, still flawed, still flailing.

Any home that human beings make is an imperfect one. But our challenge is not achieving perfection – it is pursuing *compassion*. It is leaning away from uncaring individualism and leaning into interdependence. It is understanding that until all of us are free, *none of us are free*. Earth is the only house we have. And it's on fire. It's easy to look at the flames and say that's not my problem. It's harder to admit that even if it isn't our fault, it's still our responsibility. Before we can make this house a home, we've got to make sure it's still standing. We have to admit that our futures are intertwined with each other's. We have to put our hope and faith in the power of our combined efforts. In a world full of fire starters, we must become fire fighters.

How do you fight a fire? In our modern times, firefighters assemble with their masks and suits, hoses and axes. They saturate flames with water and chemicals. But in the days before modern technology, people used different tactics.

Before we had fire hydrants and fire engines, people carried water by hand. They called it a bucket brigade. Before fire fighters arrived, anyone who was able grabbed a bucket and got moving. People would form lines from the water source to the fire. They would pass full buckets of water to throw on the flames. Then they would pass the empty buckets back to be refilled.

Now I know somebody's thinking – how do you quench a world of flames with a bucket? My point is not that we need to reproduce their method. We need to embody their spirit. What is that? It's a spirit of collaboration. It's the recognition that every hand helps to lighten the load. It is the willingness to get into good trouble when you see an urgent need. It is the strength to stand in defense of those who are suffering. It's the courage to speak out when dissent is being silenced. It is the fortitude to stay true to your convictions when others might turn their backs. It is the knowledge that when everyone grabs their buckets, one drop turns into an ocean deep. There is power in the people, but it takes all of us put together.

How do you stop the world from burning? Well, you certainly don't do it alone. Or in a single moment. It doesn't take a grand gesture; it requires a consistent effort. It is not a solo played by one great artist; it is a symphony sounded out by a full orchestra. Ella Baker said it well – “strong people don't need strong leaders.” What we need is to know our own strength and operate in it.

The world is on fire. The house is burning down. And we cannot sit quietly waiting for rain, for miracles, for would-be messiahs. Perhaps we are exactly who we have been waiting for – the ones to put out the flames. And we will do it a bucket at a time. When we break bread with the hungry. When we give shelter to the unhoused. When we sit with the wounded and afflicted. When we speak a word of hope to those in utter despair. When we organize to protest unjust laws and policies. When we treat the suffering of one as the concern of all.

Love Always

Loving is easy but hard. Love me. When I am evil, when I hurt you most, when I have nothing to give back, when I ask for more than I deserve, I am worthy of love, I am worthy of light.

When you see me on the street forsaken, hungry, naked, lost in needs, no one will meet, like my mother would if she knew how, like my father would if he knew love, comfort me. Like my sisters would as they wiped my tears, and my brothers would if they were still here. Love me. Console my shards. With patience, hold the pieces.

With forgiveness, feel their sharpness. Let kindness heal and seal me, please. Bare all that is me. Believe and hope in all I can be.

Love me with an unconditional embrace that never ends. A bear and a bee touch their noses, sigh, sweet kiss. Love always, Honey.

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord; and we pray that all unity will one day be restored. And they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand; and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other side by side and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride. They will know we are Christians by our love.

Love is the way (Reprise)

Love is the way. Glory! Truth marches on.
Alleluia.

Vespers Leadership

Members of Theodicy Jazz Collective

Andrew K. Barnett, piano
William Z. Cleary, alto saxophone
Imani Grace Cooper, voice
Reginald Cyntje, trombone
Mike Wade, trumpet
Jonathan Parker, tenor saxophone
Kevin Smith, bass
Robert Boone, drums

Ministers

Rev. Jeremy Lawson, Senior Minister
Rev. Dr. Natalee Dukes Hamby
Rev. Montana Hamby
Rev. Lisa Lawrenz

with Sanctuary Choir

Ryan Ferguson, Director of Music and Worship

Raina Wood, Organist

Beth Alexander	Arlyn Hawley	Jane Seaton
Mack Alexander	John Herron	Macey Smith
Holly Beavers	DeAnn Hopkins	Billy Stone
Martha Beeson	Giavanni Jackson	Zane Taylor
Will Beeson	Tom Jackson	Erin Towe
Carolyn Bieniek	Cole Jones	Mason Towe
Laura Blanco	Deana Jones	Callie Waller
Blaine Bostelman	Steven Jones	Dave Walton
Dawn Bradley	Thomas Jones	Gail Walton
Melissa Bush	Andrew Latimer	Aleah Weldon
Sofia Castillo	James Lawson	Craig Widenhouse
Anna Connor	Amy McCollum	Chris Wilhite
Steven Dasher	Katie McCollum	Rose Wills
Cathy Felton	Eva Miller	Evelyn Winstead
Alex Gilliam	Lynne Nagy	Jennifer Wyrick
Heather Grace	Ann Orr	Joe Wyrick
Morgan Grace	Joy Ovington	Karen Yanosky
Carlyn Haley	Patti Pitts	
Dana Harrell	Ross Rainey	

Upcoming Services and Concerts

CANDLELIGHT CAROLS

AFUMC Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra with the Georgia Children's Chorus
Sunday, December 13, 2026 | 7:00 p.m.

Celebrate the joy of the season with an evening of Christmas carols in our adorned Sanctuary. Bathed in the glow of candlelight and Chrismon trees, come and sing your favorite carols, including candlelight "Silent Night," with the AFUMC Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra and the Georgia Children's Chorus, the resident choir for children and youth at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music.

Christmas cookie reception to follow in Hancock Hall!

THE LONGEST NIGHT

Monday, December 21, 2026 | 6:00 p.m.

For many, Advent and Christmas are seasons of joy: family gatherings, celebrations, carols, and feasting. But for those experiencing grief, illness, loneliness, anxiety, or major life transitions, this time of year can be a difficult season. Held on the longest night of the year, this quiet service offers an opportunity to honestly name sorrow and proclaim the gentle hope of Christ's light shining in the darkness. With music provided by solo voice and harp.

CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

Thursday, December 24, 2026

3:00 p.m. Children's Candlelight Service

5:00 p.m. Candlelight Service | *Wesleyan Youth Choir and brass*

7:00 p.m. Candlelight Service | *Sanctuary Choir and brass*

11:00 p.m. Candlelight Holy Communion | *Sanctuary Choir and strings*

Join us on Sundays for Worship | 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

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ATHENS FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

327 N LUMPKIN ST. ATHENS, GA 30601 • 706-543-1442 | athensfirstumc.org