



“I’M PRETTY SURE THIS IS HOW  
GOD WOULD HAVE US BE.”

“I WAS ATTENDING TILLOTSON COLLEGE IN 1941 when I decided to marry. Now I was raised a Presbyterian, but there were no colored Presbyterian churches in Austin at the time [churches were segregated in those days]. I told my history teacher about my dilemma, and she said, ‘That’s okay; I’m getting a group of people together to start an Episcopal church. Why don’t you join us?’ So I did.”

Bertha Sadler Means is one of the founding members of St. James Episcopal Church in Austin. It is regarded by many as one of the most racially, socioeconomically diverse churches in the nation.

“I am the granddaughter of a former slave from Tennessee who founded the first colored Cumberland Presbyterian church in Texas. I pretty much came up not looking at the color of somebody’s skin. I see people as people. Not white people. Not black people. Not gay people. Just people. I’m pretty sure this is how God would have us be. But I vividly remember segregation, and I remember the separate toilets and the separate water fountains and such. Those were turbulent times, and we had to rely on God to carry us through. I suppose that is one of the reasons why our church was so important to us — because it was a haven of compassion and love. We consciously extended ourselves to make it as diverse as we could possibly make it. We live the Golden Rule. We welcome everybody. Would you like to come to our church?”

BERTHA SADLER MEANS *Episcopalian. Colorblind. Texan.*