

## **“Warm All Night”**

Four days a week, Holy Comforter’s vans fan out across South Atlanta. They collect worshippers for Eucharist and Friendship Center participants for art, gardening, yoga, meals, and other activities. Once a month, they collect guests for Holy Comforter’s version of *Saturday Night Live*: music and sumptuous meals provided by a parish from a northern suburb. Then there’s driving to a Valentine’s Day or St Patrick’s Day dance at a parish in Buckhead and on field trips to places like the zoo, the botanical gardens, the aquarium, and Callaway Gardens. Some drivers are employees; most are volunteers.

Shortly after I became Vicar, our bookkeeper, who too often found herself driving, recruited my wife, Cozette. Knowing that Cozette planned to volunteer at the Friendship Center, she asked, “Wouldn’t you like to drive a van?” Cozette responded, “I think I’d like that, all but the driving part.” She proved, however, to be one of the most adept drivers. Her passengers felt safe with her at the wheel and cheered when she successfully navigated the narrow streets of old neighborhoods or faced down city busses. Some of the best stories of Holy Comforter come from her experiences. The following is perhaps my favorite.

One day as her 15 passenger van passed a homeless encampment under stacked overpasses at the center of the city, Sytha, one of her passengers, piped up from the front seat, “I used to be homeless.” Others added that they were happy not to have to live that way anymore (without mentioning that their group home had been without electricity for almost two weeks).

Sytha is a singer of spirituals and an accomplished folk artist. She has lived with schizophrenia most of her adult life and, before she went on disability, eked out a living as a house cleaner. Her artistry emerged after a Friendship Center artist showed Sytha some of her work and cash made from selling her art. Sytha said, “I can do that.”

Sytha went on to tell of one particularly cold night in Atlanta when she was homeless. She sought warmth in the vast lobby of Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta’s public hospital and the place where most homeless and mentally ill people in Atlanta go for care. As she lingered in the lobby, a guard asked what

she was doing there. She replied that she was waiting for her cousin to pick her up. Cozette interjected, "Well, I hope you told him that your cousin was coming from Ohio." Sytha said, "No, I told him, 'Paulding County.'" (Paulding County is in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and Sytha probably has a cousin there.)

Sytha smiled, "I lied, but I was warm all night."