

Cathedral Park Meditation Walk

Script for downloadable self-guided audio tour of Cathedral Park

Introduction

Welcome to Cathedral Park. We are delighted you are here visiting our property. This audio tour has eight stops and should take 30 to 45 minutes, depending on how much time you spend at each stop. Each stop is in a separate file so you can begin the tour at any stop, but we suggest you begin at stop number one, then move in sequential order. Since the narration for each stop is in a separate file, you can take the tour all at once or in segments.

The first stop is at the Pergola of Hope, which you will find on the upper level. The pergola is a covered walkway connecting the two sides of the parking lot. In a metal box there, you will find a map of the property to help you locate each of the stops on the tour. Maps can also be found in a metal box near the steps next to the waterfall on Torcido Road and at the entrance to the lower level, near the exit gate.

The property gates are generally open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. On the weekends, the gates are closed, but you can park outside the gates and walk up the stone steps to the right of the waterfall on Torcido Road. If it is not during business hours when you visit, be sure to park outside the gates, even if they are open when you arrive. Otherwise your presence may not be noticed and your car could get locked in.

You are certainly welcome to just wander these grounds in any direction and at any pace you wish. This audio recording will take you on a certain path, and along the way you will learn about the property and its history, and you will have some time to enjoy nature. From time to time on this tour, we will give you opportunities to sit and invite you to some interactive meditations.

But now let's get to the tour. Please move to stop number one at the pergola on the upper level and start the stop one recording when you are ready.

Stop #1 – The Pergola of Hope and Trinity Fountain

This tour has eight stops, and you are at stop number one. If you have not listened to the introduction recording, you should do so now.

Take a seat on one of the benches under the Pergola of Hope or in the fountain area. As you do, notice the vine covering the pergola. It is an antique rose called Old Blush. It was the type of rose that covered the arbor at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, where Generals Lee and Grant agreed to end the Civil War in 1865.

The fountain is called the Trinity Fountain, and you will see that it has three corners. Of course in the Christian tradition, trinity is an important concept – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Water is also important in the Christian faith as well as in nature. For sheer pleasure, nothing beats the sound of a fountain or a water fall. As you sit and enjoy the sight and sound of Trinity Fountain, think about how you have used water in your own life. Maybe it's giving the kids a

bath. Maybe it's times at the beach or the neighborhood swimming pool. In San Antonio, water is sometimes a scarce resource, especially during times of drought.

The plants in the fountain area include Mexican honeysuckle, mountain laurel, and blue shade ground cover. But throughout the property, plants are seasonal and may or may not be blooming when you tour the grounds. On this app you will find a plant tab that will help you identify plants you may come across on the tour. Note the pots in the fountain area were made by Harding Black, a well-known Texas potter.

We invite you to pause the recording now and spend some time thinking about water. This might be a good time to give thanks to God for all the ways water brings you blessings; and it might be a good time to pray for those who do not have clean drinking water at their disposal. It might be good also, to ask God to bless our land with rain.

Sit for as long as you wish. When you are ready, look across the parking lot where you will see a small adobe style house. Head in that direction, which is stop number two. You can begin to listen to the stop two recording when you are ready.

Stop #2 - Chapel House

This tour has eight stops, and you are at stop two. This house is known as Chapel House. It is used regularly for worship, retreats, and meetings, but is not open to the public for tours at this time. Back in the 1920s, it was the home of Godcheaux Halff, who was a local business man. Mr. Halff founded WOAI radio and an automobile dealership, along with other business ventures. His parents had immigrated from Alsace Lorraine and were instrumental in early Texas

ranching and business. The house was known for its beautiful gardens and was always on the spring San Antonio Garden Club tour.

We acquired the house as part of the property in the early nineteen sixties and have remodeled it without changing its lovely character. What was once Mr. Half's living room is now a 30-seat chapel. What was a screened-in porch is now an enclosed conference room that seats 80 people.

In the house are three bedrooms, two of which are often used by special overnight guests.

Unfortunately, Chapel House is not open for individual tours at this time.

It may be that while you are on the property, there will be some activity going on in Chapel House, and we ask that you be aware of that.

Walk now to the left, as we begin to head around chapel house. This walkway, called Chapel House Walk, is handicapped accessible but is still somewhat bumpy, so please watch your step.

As you round the second corner to your right, you will find a small structure in the same design as the house. It's actually just a storage building, but people always ask about it.

Continuing around, you will come to the patio and grassy area behind Chapel House that is dominated by a huge live oak tree.

But look also to your right across the patio where there are some steps leading up to a small apartment. At the bottom of the steps is a big-tooth maple. This is the type of tree found in Lost Maples State Natural Area. These beautiful maple trees are called "lost" because there are only a few small native populations of them, hundreds of miles apart from each other and "lost" from other maples.

We will spend some time here, so make your way to one of the benches in the small deck overlook on the left. We call it the Sunrise Overlook because from this vantage point, the sun rising in the East is a spectacular sight. When you are comfortable, begin to listen to the file for stop three.

Stop #3 – The Live Oak and Sunrise Overlook

This tour has eight stops and you are at stop number three. Our lovely live oak tree is said to be 200 years old. Notice that the branches of the live oak point in a certain direction. There is an interesting story about that. When this tree was young, these grounds attracted Native Americans because of nearby springs. We are told that Native Americans would bend the branches of a young tree to point in the direction of water, and these branches do indeed point to the springs on Cathedral Park property

This property is part of the Olmos Basin which includes Olmos Creek and the Olmos Dam. Olmos Basin is a catchment area for the Edwards Aquifer, the primary source of water for San Antonio. Olmos Basin was once populated with dozens of artesian springs that shot up from the ground in the rainy season and gave birth to the San Antonio River. Our next-door neighbor, Incarnate Word University, is the site of the acknowledged headwaters of the river at a spot called the Blue Hole.

But the San Antonio River is fed by multiple springs throughout the Olmos Basin, some of which are located on Cathedral Park property. It is toward these springs that our wonderful Live Oak points, and later in the tour we will see what is left of the springs. Sadly, these springs no

longer flow because the population of San Antonio draws increasing amounts of water out of the Aquifer, and because of the sustained drought that is affecting San Antonio.

When Native Americans roamed this area, the Olmos Basin flowed abundantly and was a source of life. Not far from here, along the banks of the Olmos Creek, indigenous peoples hunted and fished.

Because of the springs, this property was of great spiritual significance to Native Americans. Their understanding of earth and especially water as life-giving is foundational to their spirituality. In fact, the Coahuiltecan Native Americans of south central Texas considered the Blue Hole and the springs on this property to be one of four sacred Fountain Sites in south central Texas. The other three are Barton Springs in Austin, San Marcos Springs in San Marcos, and Comal Springs in New Braunfels.

At these sacred sites, Native Americans engaged in ceremonial practices, likely including the use of mountain laurel seeds and other hallucinogenic plants in their rituals. They referred to the San Antonio River as “Yanaguana” which means “spirit waters.”

When you are ready, follow the stone path that encircles the grassy courtyard, and you will come to the baptismal font. As you leave the overlook, look way over the railing for some low palm bushes. Legend has it that the early Spanish missionaries collected palm branches from this area for use in Palm Sunday processions the week before Easter.

You can start the recording for stop four when you get to the font.

Stop #4 – Baptismal Font

This tour has eight stops and you are at stop number four.

The baptismal font, which is used regularly for baptisms, reminds us that water is important in the Christian faith. We use water when we baptize someone to signify new birth. We remember that Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River just before he began his active ministry. In baptism, we are made part of God's family and become the recipients of God's good gifts, many of which we enjoy on this property.

Surrounding the baptismal font and throughout the property, you will find plants that are native to the area. A team at Cathedral Park has been working for the past several years to rid the property of exotics – plants that do not naturally belong – and replace them with native species. These plants are less water dependent and are more likely to produce nuts and seeds that attract birds and critters that are natural to the environment. To identify these plants, go to the plant tab on the app.

Remember that you can pause this recording at any time to enjoy your surroundings. When you are ready, follow the stone path as it circles the grassy courtyard, Trees in this area include crepe myrtles, cedar elm and a Chinese fringe tree that, unfortunately, blooms only briefly in the springtime.

Continue on the stone path around the grassy area. You will see four steps leading down to another stone path. Follow the lower path now to your left and then curve around to the right until you get to the columbarium. This is another opportunity for you to sit while we offer some explanation. This is the end of tape four. When you reach the columbarium and are ready, begin the recording for stop five.

Stop #5 - Columbarium

This tour has eight stops and you are at stop number five, the columbarium. Notice the Mexican wild olive at the far end. A columbarium is a place for interment of ashes of the deceased. The word columbarium is from a Latin word – *columba* - which means a nesting place for doves.

Our columbarium contains 405 niches, some of which are occupied and marked as memorials.

It is the Christian understanding that when we die, we pass into the nearer presence of God.

None of us, of course, knows exactly what that looks like or feels like, but it is foundational to our faith that when our lives on this earth are ended, they continue in an eternal life with God and with all those who have gone before us.

In the Episcopal tradition, we believe in the Communion of Saints. In this we believe that all the baptized – all who have died and all who are now living - are held together in union through God's spirit.

Our prayer book says that “The Communion of Saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead . . . bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.”

The placement of the columbarium here in Cathedral Park is particularly fitting, for its presence in this magnificent display of creation reminds us of God's generosity and favor towards us for all time. There never has been and never will be a place where God is not present and available to us.

We invite you to linger here for as long as you wish, perhaps to remember and give thanks for your own loved ones whom you no longer see. Pause the recording if you wish.

Before you leave, please know that the ashes of anyone of any faith can be interred here, and if you are interested in knowing more about that, visit our offices during regular business hours, generally Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm.

Follow the path now in the direction from which you came, but veer off to the right as the path begins to wind downward once again. In the open area on your right, you will see a large boulder with a flat face. This is an area for the scattering of ashes of the deceased rather than having them interred in the columbarium. We are in the beginning phase of this option, and in the near future the names of those scattered here will be inscribed on the face of the rock.

Follow the path, noting the lovely plantings in the terraced area below the columbarium. You will want to consult the plant tab to identify them, but remember they may not be in place when you visit, or new plants may be there. It is all up to nature.

In this area you may find possum haw holly, big tooth maples, turk's cap, mountain laurel, magic carpet, pigeon berry, Montezuma cypress, buckeye, and wild olive. All of these are native to the land and provide food and shelter for area wildlife.

It is a local belief that to carry a buckeye in your pocket brings good luck, so go ahead and pluck one from the tree. A buckeye looks like a very small brown pumpkin.

Continue along the path until you come upon another excellent area for sitting which we call the sunset overlook. When you get there, begin the recording for stop six.

Stop#6 – The Sunset Overlook

This tour has eight stops, and you are at stop number six. You are at the sunset overlook. In the far end of the rock wall, look carefully for a slit in the wall that looks like a mail slot. And that is kind of what it is. We invite you to write prayers, notes, questions, whatever is on your mind and put them into the slot. What you write will never be retrieved and will be seen only by God.

You might want to take time now to listen to the voices of nature. Sit quietly for a five or ten minutes and concentrate only on the sounds of the natural world. If you are lucky you may hear our resident hawk or our barred owls, the rustling trees or chirping birds. Notice how your body changes in reaction to sounds. Pause the recording as you wish and begin it again when you are ready to move on.

From here, as you look down the hill, you are looking at the location of what were once active springs. If you are physically fit, are wearing good shoes, and are the adventurous sort, you are welcome to climb down the hill. As an alternative, you can walk back to the driveway where our tour began and follow it to the lower area toward the exit gate where you will find access to the lower area.

Begin the recording for stop seven when you reach the open lawn below.

Stop #7 – The Pump House, Bridge, and Rock Basin

This tour has eight stops and we are at stop number seven. As we said, the lower level is the location of once active springs, and here you will find the pump house that supplied water from the Olmos Basin to the Halff estate. We have been told by the San Antonio Water System that

the pump house, which dates from the 1920s, is an excellent example of pump houses from that era. It may be that when you visit, the pump house will be hidden behind trees. Consult your map to find it.

Behind the pump house is the area where the artesian springs on this property were most active. Mr. Halff built a small dam here, and it is quite possible that a large pond was formed, providing a recreational outing spot for early San Antonians. On a Sunday afternoon, families might have picnicked here and swum in the pond or cruised it in rowboats.

Look for a rock-lined basin and a small wooden bridge. When we do have heavy rains, this little basin fills and overflows onto the surrounding terrain. We call it our Blue Hole, because when it is flowing, it contributes to the headwaters of the San Antonio River.

Take some time to roam this area on your own. This is the end of the recording for stop seven. When you are ready, begin the recording for stop number eight.

Stop #8 – The Great Lawn

This tour has eight stops and you are at stop number eight. The great lawn on the lower level is probably the most visited part of the grounds. The lawn is frequently the site of Frisbee-playing dogs and their owners. Visitors often spread out a blanket on the lawn and stay for a while.

Future plans for this area include an open-sided pavilion that will be used for quiet days, small retreats, and children's activities. A wildlife habitat will be available behind the pavilion area.

Sit on one of the benches as we invite you to take a little Sabbath break. Pause the recording until you find a comfortable spot.

You will probably remember that one of the Ten Commandments is to honor the Sabbath. We don't do that much any more, and that is too bad, because God established the Sabbath as an opportunity for us to not just rest from daily work but to celebrate his creation. In Old Testament times, long before the birth of Christ, the Hebrews not only rested one day a week, but also one year out of every seven. In that year, the land was to lie fallow for a year. This rest was intended not only for man, but for all of creation, including the very land itself.

Resting from our daily lives is not so much closing down as it is opening up. When we take the time to stop and breathe deeply, we open up an opportunity for God to enter in. When we stop talking and start listening, we are more able to hear the voice of God speaking to us.

If you would like, take this last opportunity to interact with nature and perhaps hear God speaking to you.

Choose something that appeals to you – a small rock, a leaf, a flower, a stick on the ground.

Notice how it feels – is it smooth? Rough? Broken? All of one piece? Does it have a particular smell?

Place it on the ground in front of you and imagine now that your object is having a conversation with God who, after all, created this object. What might this object have to say to its creator? Is it thankful? Has it been hurt? Is it happy to be contributing to nature?

What about you? What conversation would you like to have with God right now? Pause the recording if you wish.

Thank you for visiting Cathedral Park. Sit as long as you like, wander at your leisure, and come back often. On the app you will find a tab with information on how to contact us, and we would be happy to hear from you with comments or suggestions.

May God bless you this day and every day.