



Every Day of the Week

by *Alpheus Mathis*

In 1863, 21 freed slaves and enslaved African Americans from Fredericksburg, Virginia, came to Washington, D.C., and founded Shiloh Baptist Church. Since then its membership has grown by the thousands, and it has become a center for African-American life in the Shaw community and in the city. It has survived the unknowns brought about by the end of slavery, the dismantling of Reconstruction, Jim Crow, segregation, racist mobs in 1919, the disturbances of 1968 following the assassination of Dr. King, and a fire in 1989. It has always held a special place for me.

Church is not just on Sunday. Church is supposed to be every day of the week. When you wake up in the morning, you say: "Lord, I thank you for this day." I was raised as a Southern Baptist. My whole family came from Georgia. My father came first, seeking employment, and then my mother and my brother and I joined him. One Sunday night, during an evening service, we all joined Shiloh as a family.

Church members were from various Southern states. It was a warm, family-oriented church. You felt welcomed. They fed you fried "gospel bird" (chicken), string beans, mashed potatoes, cake, and punch. But the drawing card was the preaching — the sustenance that you got was the word. You went to the house of the Lord to seek guidance. Shiloh was an open haven for people

coming to the city.

Back in the 1940s, Shiloh was a mecca for young ministers. If you attended Howard Divinity School, and you had tutelage under Reverend Harrison, you were called a "Son of Shiloh." New ministers gained credibility by learning to preach under him. Many Washington churches got their start from a relationship with Shiloh — it was a nursery for preachers. That made a great impression on us and many others. The preaching, the people, and the

tradition made you feel at home again.

There were close to 4,000 people then. Each family joined a "named" circle, and that would become your extended family. Each circle had a representative who would deliver the spiritual and social concerns of his group in the circle leaders' council. The church had programs for new members, indigent people, and even a clothing store. That began a

tradition of ministering to an extended family. If you were sick, they had prayer bands who prayed for you. You supported each other. I joined the usher board because the first impression is always the lasting impression. You dressed sharp, you wore white gloves. People served by the church served the church back.

Even now, there are a lot of outreach programs. The Family Life Center ministers to the church and to residents of the Shaw communities. There are technical training programs, programs for seniors, a nursery, and a restaurant. Even though times have changed, the church continues to feed its flock spiritually, physically, and mentally. The bottom line is that the family bond draws us together. We pray together, we grow together, we stay together as a church home.

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Alpheus Mathis has been a member of Shiloh Baptist Church since 1946. A professional caterer for more than 30 years, he has prepared dinners for congregants at Shiloh as well as for occupants of the White House. He lives with his wife and son in Fort Totten.

Our Experiences at Adas Israel

by Raymond and Pearl Kruger

How difficult was it going to be to find our place at a Conservative Jewish congregation of more than 1,600 in the nation's capital? Did we want to be as active as we had been in the two small suburban congregations to which we had belonged? For us, the answer was a resounding yes.

Adas Israel now has two rabbis, two cantors, and a myriad of programs and activities designed to interest and serve our diverse synagogue community. It includes families that have been members for three or four generations, people in the federal government, and many young professionals. It has developed special services in addition to the one in the main sanctuary. For 29 years there has been a *havurah*,* to which we belong. The service is shorter, and there is study in the form of a "give and take" sermon. All parts of the service are performed by members of the group. We have both learned to read the Torah after being trained by a member of the *havurah*, and Pearl chooses from among six or seven people to preside over the service.

More recently, another lay-led service called the Traditional Egalitarian *Minyan*** has become well attended by younger adults. Its unique name

means that it includes more of the Sabbath prayers and is totally in Hebrew, but is led by both men and women. This service, not coincidentally, serves as a place for singles to meet. At High Holiday time, we need five different services to accommodate members from all over the Washington area. Both of us sing in a volunteer choir in one of the services.

We have a very active Hebrew literacy program for adults who either never learned the language or forgot it. Pearl teaches one of those classes. We keep our home open to Washington-area students who cannot be with their families on some of the

Jewish holidays. The synagogue is not the only place for worship; the home is the little sanctuary in Judaism.

Partly because of the increasing expense of funeral arrangements, a Bereavement Committee, *hevrah chadisha* (holy brotherhood), was started. We are co-chairs of the group that provides "guardians" for the deceased from death until burial. Ray served for a time

with the group that prepares the body for burial. Pearl provides evening services at homes during the week of mourning. It is interesting to note that one of the first things the members of Adas Israel did when they established the congregation in 1876 was to buy a plot of burial ground — a sign, in religious terms, that this was their new home.

Adas Israel is very much tied to the life of Washington. We receive many dignitaries and diplomats in search of a traditional Jewish service when they come to our city. We maintain close ties

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*Derived from the Hebrew word *haver*, which means friend. A *havurah* is a small group of individuals, couples, or families who form a close community through the sharing of common interests and regular meetings.

**The minimum number of males (10) required to constitute a representative "community of Israel, or quorum," for liturgical purposes.