



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.



with the African-American community. Each year, on the King holiday weekend, the pastor of Turner Memorial A.M.E. Church (now housed in Adas's last downtown sanctuary) comes and preaches a sermon at Friday night services, their choir sings, and we enjoy a Shabbat meal together. On the following Sunday, we go to Turner Memorial, our rabbi preaches at their service, our choir sings, and we enjoy Sunday dinner with them.

So here is our place to pray, teach, learn, help others, and socialize. Our motto of "patronize your local synagogue" is still right for us.

Raymond and Pearl Kruger have been married for 49 years and have lived for the last 21 years in the District of Columbia. They have been singing in Zemer Chai, Washington's Jewish community chorus, for 21 years. They have three daughters, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Ray is now a sculptor and a docent at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Pearl is a tour guide at the Kennedy Center.

Haroset and Hoecake: The African-American/ Jewish Seder in D.C.

by Michael Twitty

Each year I join other African Americans and Jewish Americans of Shiloh Baptist Church and Adas Israel Congregation for a Seder in celebration of freedom and our commitment to social justice. Coming as families, activists, clergy, and students, some 400–500 people a year participate in one of the largest African-American/Jewish Seders in the nation. It is part of

a tradition that began in D.C., in 1968, when Rabbi Arthur Waskow and other Jews involved in the Civil Rights Movement held a "Freedom Seder" incorporating common themes of struggle. Each year, Adas Israel, Shiloh Baptist, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith work together to sponsor the event.

The Seder is only one example of cultural democracy at work in African-American/Jewish coalition building in Washington. *Common Quest* magazine is a joint project between Howard University's Afro-American Studies Department and the American Jewish Committee. Operation

Understanding brings African-American and Jewish students together for holidays, trips, and dialogues. American and Howard universities offer jointly taught courses on the history and contemporary relevance of African-American/Jewish relations.

The Seder occurs approximately two weeks before the actual Passover, and the congregations alternately

host the evening. When Shiloh hosts, it is the rare occasion when a *mashgiach* (inspector) supervises the preparation of food to insure it is kosher. When Adas Israel hosts, it is the only time of the year when cornmeal and raw greens are prepared for ritual consumption.

Central to the Seder is the use of symbolic foods. Matzo and hoecake sit side by side as breads of poverty and affliction. Parsley is wed with collard greens, symbolizing the bitterness of oppression. Salt water reminds us of both the tears of the Israelites and the waters of the Atlantic during the Middle Passage. Tasting *haroset* (a mixture of apples, nuts, and wine symbolizing mortar) and hoecake, I am reminded that in both traditions food expresses the soul. I savor roast chicken, matzo ball soup, and *tzimmes* (a sweet

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