

## REVEREND NOKUTHULA DHLADHLA

## THE HOPE & UNITY METROPOLITAN CHURCH

#### PASTOR FOR METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

Nokuthula was born in Soweto and comes from a
charismatic Christian background. When her church found
out about her sexuality she was victimised by the pastor
and other church-members. Instead of showing support
after she was gang-raped, the church claimed that she was
being punished for her 'evil ways'.

Nokuthula then found a spiritual home at the
LGBTI-affirming Hope & Unity Metropolitan Community
Church (HUMCC) where she served as a pastor for 12 years.
She has recently started a church in Soweto, the House of
Prayer and Worship MCC.

"I started having a burning need to work for God ... It felt good to preach and bring hope to those who have lost hope. I stopped worrying about my sexuality; I had found a way to somehow make the two work together, and I was at peace."

"When my church found out about my sexuality, I was hounded in such a way that I thought God did not exist ... They said it was an abomination, evil."

#### (HUMCC) 1994-2012

The HUMCC was established in 1994 by Reverend Tsietsi
Thandekiso, with its first home in rented rooms above The
Skyline bar in Hillbrow. For 18 years it served as a spiritual
home to those seeking guidance in reconciling their
sexual identity with their relationships with God. After
Thandekiso's death in 1997, leadership of the church was
taken over by Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla and Reverend
Paul Mokgethi-Heath.

Reverend Paul Mokgethi-Heath being baptised by Reverend Tsietsi Thandekiso. "For me Church is not about sexuality, it's about everybody coming together and worshiping God and feeling at home." Reverend Mokgethi-Heath

"When I first went to the HUMCC I was overwhelmed, meeting a gay priest and being around so many gay people ... But then I heard Reverend Thandekiso preach about how God made us all unique and special." Reverend Dhladhla



"I remember when I was ordained into the HUMCC my grandmother said: 'I accept you. You cannot be anything else. Just be yourself'." "I felt that because of the role that I play in the church ... members needed to know about my status. I knew that by coming out I would also be helping others in the same situation." Reverend Mokgethi-Heath on revealing his HIV+ status

# Choosing loving families, cultivating visionary leaders

## HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH & LGBTI SUPPORT GROUP



## FATHER RUSSELL POLLITT

#### DIRECTOR OF THE JESUIT INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

TINO CHRIS\*

FINDING A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Father Russell Pollitt is the current Director of the Jesuit Institute of South Africa and served as the parish priest for seven years at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. During this time, an LGBTI support group was established at Holy Trinity. Members were actively welcomed into the life of the church and the group continues to meet fortnightly.

Father Russell blessing a leader of the LGBTI group at a prayer service before the 2012 Pride March.

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"My work with migrants led me to hear about the struggles of LGBTI people in their community – first being rejected at home and then by the refugee community in South Africa."

> "There was a certain amount of opposition and some people were uncomfortable. But in time most people got used to the idea."

Tino\*, originally from Zimbabwe, came to Johannesburg in 2010. He doesn't have a full-time job and struggles to make ends meet, but has found a spiritual refuge at Holy Trinity. Tino first joined the LGBTI group that meets at Holy Trinity and has since adopted Catholicism in favour of the Pentecostal tradition in which he grew up.

\* Not his real name.

"It was just a feeling inside me, waiting to come out. But with the situation back home, it was difficult; there was no one to talk to about these things."

"I grew up in a religious family and attended a Pentecostal church which is totally against homosexuality – they saw it as the work of the devil."

"I don't have any problem serving God because of my sexuality. He created me



"LGBTI is a very contentious and divisive issue in the Catholic Church. You put yourself on the line by speaking out about certain issues. For the most part it's not addressed. There's just silence around it."

#### this way. I'm His son and I serve Him."

"The Holy Trinity group showed me that I could connect the Bible, my sexuality and my relationship with God."





## IMAM MUHSIN HENDRICKS

#### FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE INNER CIRCLE (TIC)



Are you Gay and Muslim?

Are you struggling to reconcile Islam with your sexuality?

Has the question of leaving Islam because of your sexuality plagued you? Are you in need of friends you can identify with?

The Inner Circle

can help you!

entify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or estioning Muslims and interested members of other faiths.

ize Quranic and other spiritual tools for self-actualization a

e assist in the process of reconciling sexuality with spirituality though our weekly and annual programs.

e provide free psychological and spiritual counseling b professionals in their field.

social and spiritual responsibility

For more information contact

The Inner Circle

Website: http://www.theinnercircle-za.or E-mail: admin@theinnercircle-za.org Telephone: 082 507 3412 (Muhsin)

cipate in community outreach programs as a means to fulfill a

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Muhsin Hendricks grew up in a traditional Muslim family, the grandson of an imam. After pursuing Islamic studies in Pakistan, he married and got a part-time teaching job while also serving as an assistant imam.

At 29 Muhsin got divorced and came out as openly gay. He was asked to leave the mosque where he worked and worshipped, and continued to have a tense relationship with the local Muslim community.

Mushin's own struggles with his sexuality and religion made him realise there must be others going through similar experiences, and led him to establish The Inner Circle (TIC). "When I reached puberty, my first attraction was to a boy in my class. At that point, I knew I was in trouble. My grandfather was an imam too and used to preach about those people that will go to hell."

"Is it good Muslim practice to disregard someone who is different from the mainstream simply because they do not fit in with our interpretation of Islam?" The Inner Circle (TIC) is a Cape Town-based support organisation for LGBTI Muslims, with beginnings as far back as 1996.

Starting out as an informal study circle in Muhsin's house,
TIC has since grown into a public service provider with
various programmes aimed at reconciling faith and
sexuality amongst queer Muslims. TIC members range in
age from 16 to 70, falling across the LGBTI spectrum.

Muhsin is also certified as a marriage officer allowing him to perform traditional Muslim weddings as well as Civil Unions. "TIC is a Human Rights Organisation working within an Islamic framework to give psycho-spiritual and social support to Muslims who are marginalised based on sexual orientation and gender identity."

"The Quran is a book for all times and it should be studied in its context in order for it to become relevant to our times. We believe in interpreting the Quran in a way that brings healing

and mercy to people rather than guilt and shame."

"We do not believe that the Quran is discriminatory or that it condemns sexual diversity, but rather that the Quran embraces sexual diversity and instructs its adherents to act sexually within a framework of faithfulness, justice, self-restraint and God consciousness."

"They always say Islam is against homosexuality and that is how they silence you. Muslims are still suffering between loyalty to their faith and loyalty to their children who are gay."

# Breaking barriers, building communities

PROGRESSIVE JJDASM

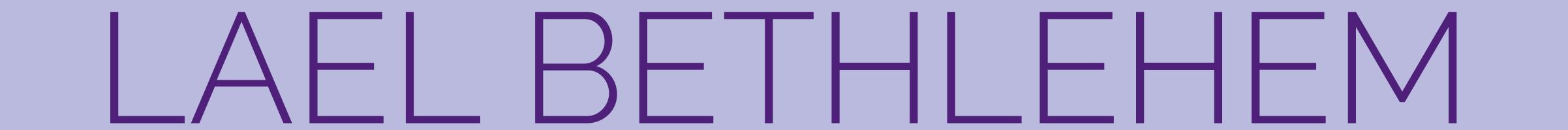
Progressive or Reform Judaism is a liberal branch of Judaism that breaks with the more traditional and rigid teachings of Orthodox Judaism. Principles of the Progressive movement include informed choice, gender equality, social justice and an acceptance that Judaism will continue to evolve and change.

The first Progressive synagogue in South Africa, Temple Israel in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, opened its doors in 1936. Soon after, the congregation established a school in Alexandra township and continued to support it throughout the apartheid years.

The Progressive Jewish community in South Africa welcomes LGBTI people, and Progressive rabbis conduct same-sex marriage ceremonies.



### $\mathbf{D}\mathbf{A}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{D}\mathbf{B}\mathbf{I}$



URBAN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER

David worships primarily at Beit Emanuel in Parktown, Johannesburg. Growing up in a Modern Orthodox Jewish household, he struggled to come to terms with his sexuality, religion and culture. He is the founder of the LGBTI group Jewish OUTlook, serves as the international chair of Limmud – an organisation dedicated to Jewish learning – and participated in the successful bid to have same-sex unions legalised in South Africa.

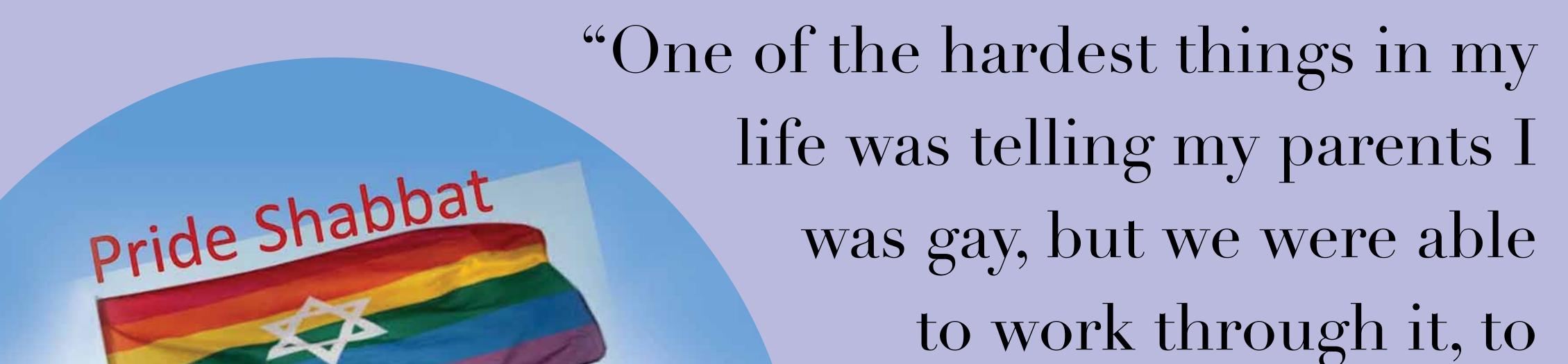
"I started feeling I didn't have a place in the Orthodox Jewish community because of my sexuality and other reasons. It's quite difficult to be openly gay and remain an Orthodox Jew in the full sense."

Lael worships at both Temple Israel in Hillbrow and Beit Emanuel in Parktown. She grew up in a liberal, middleclass Jewish family in Johannesburg. She lives with her wife and two adopted daughters.

As Temple Israel has no full-time rabbi, services are run by members and volunteers. Lael conducts services once a month on a Saturday morning and on Jewish festivals and holy days.

"My family was very involved in the Beit Emanuel synagogue when we were growing up. We were encouraged to think critically about our society, and to work out what we could do to contribute to change."

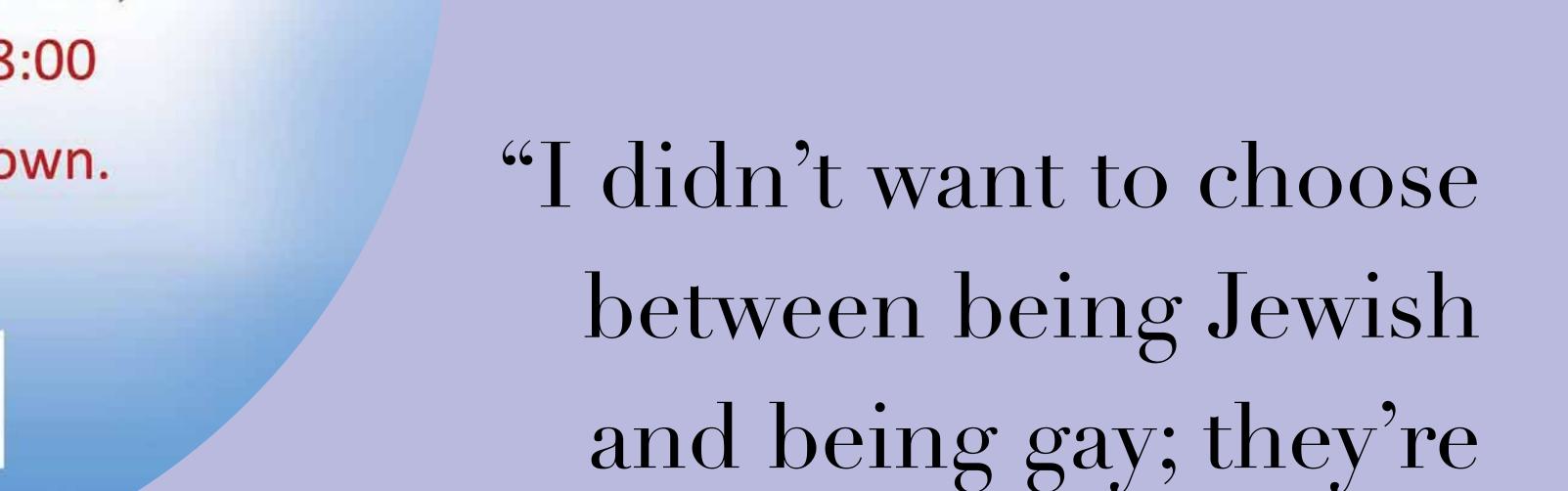
> "At Beit Emanuel women participated equally in all aspects of religious life. I never internalised the



Temple Israel in Hillbrow was the first progressive congregation in South Africa, opening its doors in 1936.

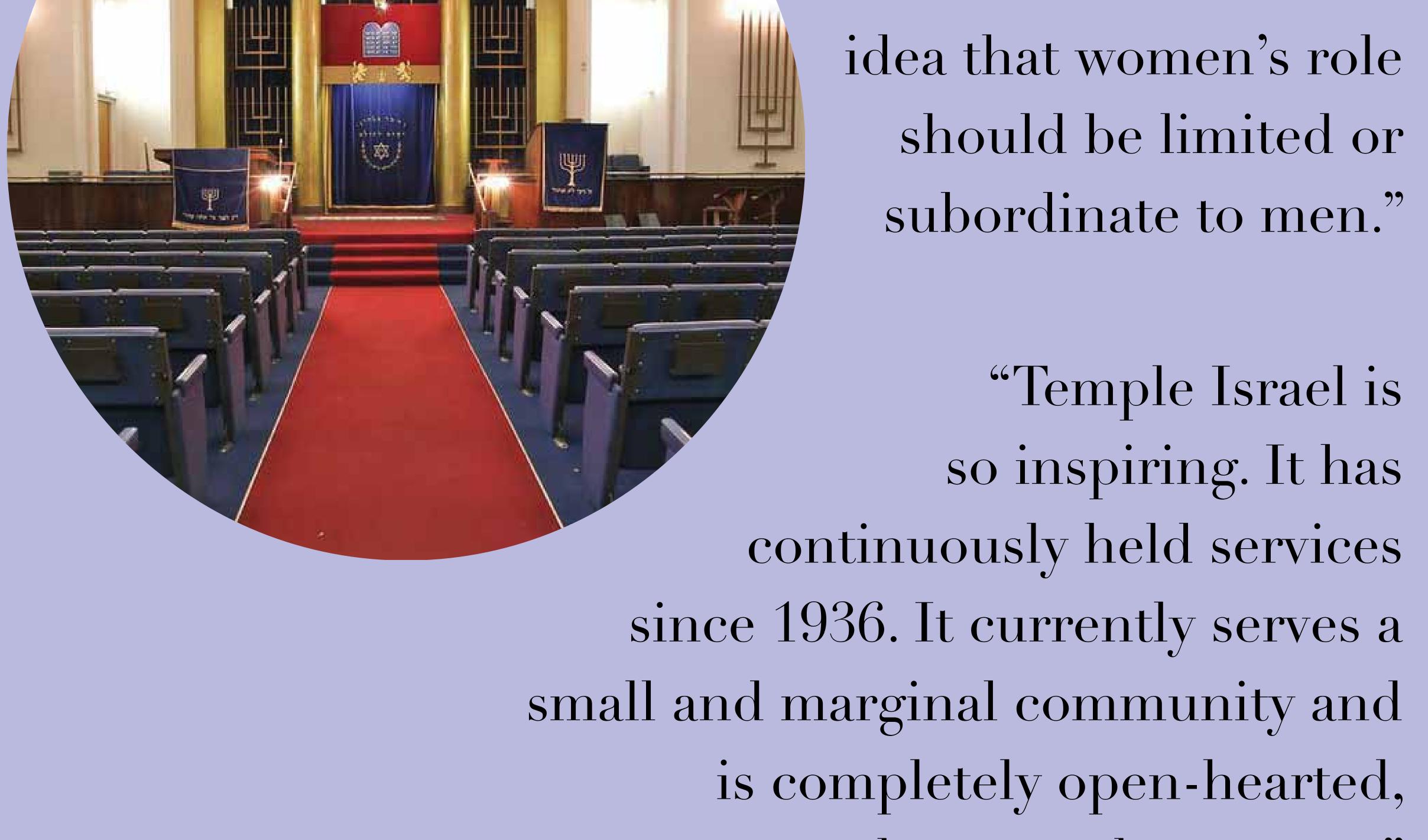
the point of complete

acceptance."



both central parts of my life."





tolerant and generous."



## PASTOR ZUNGU

#### FOUNDING PASTOR OF THE VICTORY MINISTRIES CHURCH INTERNATIONAL

## MAGATSHENI ZUNGU

#### PROPHETESS OF THE VICTORY MINISTRIES CHURCH INTERNATIONAL

"I came from Mandeni where it was a shame to be a lesbian or to have same-sex attractions because it was considered abnormal. I did not disclose early; I kept quiet until I was exhausted with hiding."

"I am a lesbian, I am born again, I am a child of God and I am going to preach the gospel."

"My job is to tell people like me that

After dating for many years, Pastor Zungu and her partner MaGatsheni married in 2012. Pastor Zungu was a teacher by profession while MaGatsheni was a fashion and interior designer.

Both Zungu and MaGatsheni were raised in charismatic churches strongly opposed to same-sex relationships. Zungu served as a child preacher but eventually left the charismatic churches due to their homophobia. After trying an LGBTI-friendly church, Zungu was disappointed by the 'un-Christian' lifestyles of those that attended, eventually leading her to start her own church in 2011.

The couple live with their adopted daughter in Chesterville, KwaZulu-Natal, and work within their congregation and the broader community supporting those seeking to reconcile their faith and their sexual orientation. "I grew up naïve, then I met someone like me in my 20s. She was butch and I am fem. She approached me and I was very scared; her life seemed demonic."

"I struggled to come out at home. After I told my mother she prayed for three months and went on a fast. I could tell she was hurting. Now my mother is a recruiter – she sees a queer person anywhere and tells them about us, that she has children like them who have a church."



we are created in His image and we are unique. We can't just focus on queerness because within that queerness lies godliness."

"As the mother of the church, MaGatsheni has to find time first for her church duties: to help the congregation, read scriptures and spend solid time with God while I am working." "My son attends church with us. He loves us and understands queerness."

"The principal at Zungu's school is very supportive. When there is an emergency, they allow her to leave so she can go and do God's work."



Together in marriage, together in church