

Dr. Mary O. Brookins Ross was the very active pastor's wife of Shiloh Baptist Church. She received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Morehouse School of Religion. She recently served seven years as a member of the Governing Board of the World Council of Churches and is currently the president of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention.

(SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH (7/8/90))  
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

(INTERVIEW WITH DR. ROSS)

I came to Shiloh in June 1930 as a bride, the Pastor's wife. My husband lost his first wife by death and there were four children. I reared those four children. I added Davene to the four that we had when we first got married.

He was my senior by a few years and he taught me in high school. I went on to college and I didn't know what he was doing and he didn't know what I was doing. After graduating from Spelman College, I was hired to teach in Augusta, Georgia. He came to Augusta to do a revival for one of the ministers there. He came to help save souls and yes, he got a soul. He proposed to me on that trip. We didn't have a long courtship. Pretty soon, I found myself in Detroit the wife of the Minister of Shiloh Baptist Church.

We lived at 950 Medbury Street and there's where Davene was born. I was afraid to go to the hospital so the doctor came to me.

There were a lot of people in this city and especially in Shiloh who thought that he might not make a bad husband. The question was, why go all the way back to Georgia to find a wife? I've done the best I could here in this church which is the second oldest Black Baptist church in Detroit.

I came during the depression and Detroit was very hard hit by that depression. We had to do a number of things to keep our self esteem, but Shiloh served a great purpose during the days of the depression. It fed people every Tuesday. The

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men in Detroit and particularly in our church needed jobs. The people at Ford Motor Company said if you bring us a letter out here from your pastor, there's a chance that you will get hired. The pastor wrote many, many letters to Ford Motor Car Company recommending certain men and they got jobs because of his letters. From the very steps of our church here, Governor Romney made one of his campaign speeches. This church was left here in spite of the fact that 39 other churches in this area fell because of the building of the Brewster Housing Project. We also had several very distinguished concert artist come to us. Paul Robeson was one of them. Many churches in the city of Detroit were afraid of Paul Robeson because they accused him of being a communist, but the Shiloh Baptist Church opened it's doors to Paul Robeson and he gave us a marvelous concert one night.

Not all of them. He was saying to us that he just wants to be free and that was the main thing that he was talking about, about being free. He was not a communist, but he wanted freedom and he found some of it in some countries other than in the United States. He sang a lot of spirituals and of course, we know that he had a great voice. In our church, the Pastor emphasized a lot of things. Two things I particularly recall. He always put emphasis on education. He wanted that the people of this church and community would see to it that their children went to school and got an education. And then he emphasized buying homes, buy a place for

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yourselves to live.

(INTERVIEW WITH MARGUERITE RHODES McINTOSH)

I came to Shiloh in 1937. My mother was the organist at the time. We were youngsters, 5 sisters followed her on the street car. We lived on the west side.

My fondest memory, I must say, was when I was singing with the Acappella Choir. My mother asked me to help the tenor section because they were on the weak side. I met a young man whose name was Willie B. McIntosh who was in the Acappella Choir. He was the lone tenor at that time. He asked me to go to the show and I went; he came on the street car to see me. He was the financial secretary of the trustee board. From the time I met him, until about 3 years before he passed, he was the financial secretary of the board. When the pastor would call for a meeting, no matter what time, night or day, he (McIntosh) would respond; and there were many times Pastor Ross would call my house at two o'clock in the morning and say, "Sweething, let me speak to your beloved." I would put him (McIntosh) on the phone and he would say, "Brother McIntosh, how are you? I was just sitting here thinking that I need some money before ten o'clock. There's something that's urgent at the church and it must be taken care of before ten o'clock, and no matter what...." He (McIntosh) would say, "Reverend, it's kind of early in the morning." He (Ross) said, "Well that's alright." He (McIntosh) said, "I have to be to work at five o'clock." He (Ross) said, "That's alright,

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you write out the check and I'll have my daughter, Angeline, pick it up before she goes to school." And often at six-thirty in the morning Angie, would come by the house. And she'd (Angie) say, "I told Father not to bother Willie." Her father would say, "But Willie's my son." When we were younger, many of us went on hayrides and we went to Belle Isle together, the younger set. Of course the younger set is now the mature set. Lena Bivens was one of the persons who stood on the corner with a bank, asking people to put a dime in the bank for a brick to build Shiloh. She did this until they started the building which was in 1922.

(DAVENE ROSS MCKINNEY) I came in that half generation after Marguerite, the generation that we couldn't run with. They were too big for us. They shooed us away, so we had to make our own little fun the best way we could. And along with me were Mary, Minnie, Pauline, Gloria and Marguerite's sisters, Agnes and Daisy, Geraldine, Nellie and two Josephines. Dorothy was sort of between. She was accepted by that group for awhile, but sometime along the way she ended up with us. We visited each other's homes, sometimes spending the night.

You can't imagine how they treated me at these various houses. Being the preacher's daughter, I spent the night or day at various houses. I used to go over to Mary's house and we'd run up and down 17th and 18th together and I would go over to the Rhodes house and they knew I was afraid of the

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dark. On Sunday they would turn out all the lights in the house, and I'm laying there shaking, and put on the Hermit's Cave. That wasn't the worst of it, they would say we're going to the show. I would think, "Oh, goodie goodie, I'm so glad." And you know what we would see?..."I Walk with a Zombie." That was at the Granada.

I went to a hairdresser named Sweetie Arthur. My mother used to tell him; "Get it as straight as a stick Sweetie, as straight as a stick." And I mean, Sweetie would have it as straight as a stick. In those days this is what we thought was the best thing to do.

(Dr. Ross) And your head would be burning.

(Davene) Burning and greasy, just as greasy as it could be.

(Dr. Ross) Davene, you spent some hours at the church too.

(Davene) I spent a lot of hours here. Let me back up for just a minute. Missionary Society at Shiloh was Wednesday. As I understand it, mother came to church almost until the time for me to be born. And this particular Wednesday she went on home from Missionary Society and I got here at 2:20 that Thursday morning.

(Dr. Ross) Women in those days went in after a certain time, after so many months. They stayed home. They didn't want anybody to see them. But I didn't stop, I came right on. A woman in our church, by the name of Sue Johnson said, "My

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God, if you're going to have that child down here at the church just be at the Missionary Society on time."

(Davene) Shiloh had some pretty lean years and it seems to me as though God has a way of letting me know that there is such a thing as miracles still existing. This church was filthy and we didn't have the money as a congregation to get it painted. It's one of the highest domes that you have in the city, making it have very good acoustics, but it's expensive to get scaffolds to paint it. And I wanted to get married. Most of my friends were married. My mother told me, "If you just get out of school then fine. You do what you want to do." So in 1953 I graduated from college (I'll get back to when in just a second). As I said, the church was just absolutely filthy. I am inclined to believe that the Lord started a little fire right up here in this vestibule. For years, we had some of the books that were charred around the edges from that very fire but He started the fire right up in that little vestibule as you're going through that door coming up on the east of the northeast side. A little column of smoke got into the main sanctuary. Because of that small damage, Shiloh Baptist Church was completely painted by the time of my wedding. So I was able to get married at Shiloh in a clean sanctuary.

After church, we all loved and we weren't afraid to go to Barthwells. We'd go to Barthwells and we would get ice cream and we would run up and down Hastings because we had friends



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that lived on Hastings.

A girlfriend of mine would take me down into the basement of her unit on Erskine and we'd come all the way through the basement to the unit right outside the church. It was just that safe in those days.

We have experienced bitter-and-thin times at Shiloh. Mother touched upon some phase of racism that we have had here at Shiloh such as the Baptist Minister's Union trying to jack up mortgage rates for Black churches. We have had some other experiences here. Shiloh, of course, was here during the only race rioting we've really had in my lifetime, and that was in 1943.

Most of us did go into higher education we became nurses, school teachers and bookkeepers.

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(INTERVIEW WITH MARY CHAPMAN HARRIS)

I came to Shiloh as a babe in arms. My grandmother was a member of this church and also my grandfather. As Davine said, we got baptized in 1938 by Reverend Ross. There were a lot of people that was instrumental in getting us to church. Brother King, Brother Gallaway, Mrs. Thomas and the streetcar. As we got older, we went to the corner and got on the Buchanan streetcar and we came to this church. We came every Sunday and stayed all day. We were in church from the very beginning until church let out.

There was a lady friend of my grandmother's who we called



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Aunt Bethel that lived over on Rowena and St. Antoine and my grandmother would come later on and they had shoe boxes, which your shoes come in, and that's what they brought our food in and then we would go over to Aunt Bethel's and eat our food and then we would come back to church.

Mother Hudson and Mother Wheeler and all those ladies used to take us around to different churches and they would somehow know that they couldn't find a ride. They would get enough money to put us all in a cab and we went from church to church to Third Sunday Meetings.