

BET DAVID – A SHORT HISTORY

In 1974, the United Progressive Congregations of Johannesburg (UPCJ) bought 10 acres of beautifully wooded land in Sandton, north of Johannesburg, to establish a synagogue. The area was largely undeveloped with many beautiful open-spaced pieces of land. Today, Sandton is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country and is home to the Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE) and many multi-national corporations.

The original house on the property became the Rabbi's home, and one of the outbuildings – a thatch-roofed African Rondavel, which is an oval or round structure typical of this country - was converted into a small shul. With the help of the UPCJ, Rabbis from the sister congregations and lay readers conducted services until a full time Rabbi joined us.

The original house was converted into a cheder (religion school) and a nursery school. Later, several new buildings were built to enlarge the nursery school and cheder classrooms.

The congregation grew rapidly over the next few years and soon a larger shul became a necessity. The management and congregants felt that the design of this new shul should be based on the design of the original shul – the African Rondavel. In 1976, the foundation stone was laid for the larger shul. The gardens were developed and landscaped, and today Bet David is known as a shul in one of the most beautiful settings in the country.

In 1986, the Mitzvah School, for students from Alexandra, a neighbouring black township, was established on the grounds by the Bet David Sisterhood as a community outreach project to assist students to complete their final year of high school. This school has become renowned for its academic and social programmes, and is also a source of great pride to the South African Progressive Reform community.

In 2003, the need arose for a multi-purpose hall. This hall, The Middleton, was also designed as a large Rondavel, and is used to host Bet David social functions. Because of its unique design and picturesque setting, it is also hired for a wide variety of private and commercial events and functions.

Today, Bet David comprises about 300 family members and has a six-member professional choir. Rabbis at Bet David have included Rabbi Walter Blumenthal, Rabbi Ben Isaacson, Rabbi Hillel Avidan and Rabbi Robert Rothman, among others. Bet David is currently looking to employ a full time Rabbi for the community.

Basic Information

Bet David is located in the heart of Morningside, Sandton, and is situated within five minutes of the Sandton CBD. The Bet David complex comprises 10½ acres of beautiful landscaped gardens; an octagonal-shaped 450-seat synagogue; The Middleton - a large function hall; the Bet David Rondavel - a small function hall; a religion school building; a nursery school building; administrative offices and staff quarters.

Minhag

Bet David follows the Minhag of the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism (SAUPJ). Please email betdavid@icon.co.za for a copy or for more information.