

From The Parnas:

By Mark I. Wolfson

Next Tuesday May 22nd is the annual Fellowship Dinner between Christ Church and Mikveh Israel. Christ Church was founded in 1695. It was one of the first religious institutions in Philadelphia, and the first parish of the Church of England in Pennsylvania. Mikveh Israel is known as "The Synagogue of the Revolution" because of the active role played by many members of Mikveh Israel in the activities leading up to the Revolution, the Revolutionary effort itself, and the formation of the United States after the war was over. Similarly, Christ Church is known as "The Nation's Church" because of the famous Revolution-era leaders who worshipped there. Among the parishioners of Christ Church were Benjamin Franklin, Betsy Ross, George Washington and John Adams.

The friendly relationship between Mikveh Israel and Christ Church goes back to pre-Revolution days. Later, in 1788, when Mikveh Israel was suffering financially after the Minister, Gershom Mendes Seixas, and several other members returned to New York after the revolution, the congregation sent out a solicitation to members of all faiths for support. Many of the members of Christ Church stepped up to help.

Fast-forward to 1938. After the retirement of Minister Louis Washburn, the Christ Church vestry (board) chose Reverend Edward Felix Kloman to take over as the Minister of the congregation. Kloman was an extremely energetic and personable man dedicated to Public Services and the betterment of the community. He immediately made friends with many local businessmen. The Old City section of downtown was very run down in those days, having just endured the Great Depression and still suffering its aftereffects.

Kloman established volunteer groups to take care of the needs of boys, girls, young families, and older residents. The groups welcomed participants from all races and creeds. Kloman believed strongly that the Church should play a role not only in the spiritual development of the neighborhood residents, but also in the general well-being of the neighborhood. He was very much bothered by the filthy streets and unpleasant environment of the Old City area.

In 1941, Kloman, along with a group of local businessmen, formed the Old Christ Church Neighborhood Businessmen's Association. Foremost among the members was the Treasurer of Mikveh Israel, David Grossman. Grossman was a local businessman who had a furniture and rug warehouse at Second and Market Streets. Grossman served as Secretary of the Association, whose stated purpose was, "the bringing together of the businessmen of the oldest business district in America for the better acquaintance with each other and cooperation for the good of all in the neighborhood." The group met monthly for lunch and by 1945 had grown to 250 members from all walks of life and a variety of religions.

Aside from the social gatherings, the accomplishments of the Association included cleaning the streets, finding jobs for the unemployed, cosigning loans for those in

need, and raising money for the war effort.

Largely in response to the atrocities committed by the Nazis in World War II, Kloman reached out to the Jewish Community, many of whom were already friends of Christ Church through their membership in the Neighborhood Businessmen's Association. He established a special and long-lasting friendship with Mikveh Israel. Every year, on Armistice Day, the Association would sponsor a "prayer for peace", led jointly by Kloman and Reverend David Jessurun Cardozo, Minister of Mikveh Israel. In 1943, Kloman, along with David Grossman, Rev. Cardozo, and other members of both institutions who were active in the Association came together to establish an annual Fellowship Dinner that is alternately hosted by Christ Church and Mikveh Israel to this day.

This year's dinner will be held in the Community House beside the Church on Tuesday May 22nd, from 5:30 to 8:00 PM. It will feature a talk given by Judge Harvey Bartle on the role of the Federal Court in Philadelphia protecting the right of freedom of religion as guaranteed by the constitution.

Please come out and support this historic friendship between two of the oldest and most prominent religious institutions in Philadelphia.