



*Protestants en Pays d'Aix*



**Protestant United Church of France  
Parish of Aix-en-Provence and environs**

## Dear visitors and friends

If you are able to visit our Church building, we wish you a warm welcome! Our congregation gathers here every Sunday to praise the Lord and worship Him, for Church (Greek ecclesia) is basically about meeting together.

At one time this building served as a synagogue for Aix's Jewish community; a plaque on the door, rue Mazarine, testifies to long-standing relationships between the Jewish and Protestant communities in Aix. The two menorahs, on either side of the main doors into the Church, have been preserved as a gesture of friendship towards those who preceded us here in expressing their faith in the living God. The menorahs evoke the Covenant contracted between God and Israel as mentioned in the Old Testament.

The cross mounted on the opposite wall is to be understood in connection with the new Covenant in Jesus Christ, the son of God, as related in the New Testament. According to the tradition of the Reformed Churches, this cross does not exhibit the crucified body of Christ so as better to convey what is at the heart of Christian faith: Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

On the communion table stands an open Bible, where the Christian finds the Word of God. The Lord's Supper, commemorating Jesus' last meal with his disciples, is regularly shared during Sunday worship. Gathered around the communion table, believers pass the bread and wine to their neighbour. All who acknowledge Christ as their Lord are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Next to the communion table stands a lectern; from here, the Minister or other worship leader conducts the service, reads the Scriptures and provides commentary on what is read.

In the gallery is the organ for the leading and accompaniment of congregational singing as well as for encouraging an atmosphere of worship and reflection.

The building is not thought of as "holy ground": though public worship takes place here every Sunday, in the adjoining halls there are other activities of the Protestant community (we have around 500 families in the Aix area), as well as of other groups and organizations which the Church facilitates, for charitable and social action on behalf of the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, or for choir practices.

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# THE INTERFAITH TEMPLE OF RECONCILIATION

## Three centuries of history

Set up on the ruins of the Gallifet's brilliant hotel soon after the 1720 plague and destroyed during the 1789 revolution, the building of the present religious structure witnessed, during two centuries, an extraordinary spiritual and human adventure.

**First Occupation:** The Jewish community reduced to 168 worshippers under the Empire had however given Aix its first Republican mayor, Mr. Jassuda Bédarride. They decided to build thirty years later a synagogue on the space left vacant on the edge of the Mazarin district. It is in this "temple" as the Aixois called the building in a premonitory way that the composer Darius Milhaud married in 1926 his cousin Madeleine Allatini in presence of Paul Claudel and Francis Poulenc.

**Second Occupation:** The Jewish community in Aix which was dispersed during the second world war had not the financial capacities to provide for the synagogue costs. With the survivors approval, the premises were bought in 1952 by the Protestant parish set up in 1938 within the new Union for Reformed Churches of France, while the Evangelical Reformed Church remained in the old Protestant temple of rue de la Masse.

### Remembrance of the Holocaust

The seven branches candelabrum (menorah), fixed on the walls of the temple, reminds us of the synagogue past. They still have a meaning for us today. They recall the long history of two oppressed religious minorities. Already in 1561, Jean Calvin, the French reformer, requested the Protestant church of Aix to be calm and patient. The two candelabrams showed the solidarity which took place between Protestants and Jews during the darkest hours of the Nazi barbarity. Henri Manen, the pastor, who was in charge of the Protestant parish of Aix from 1940 to 1945 was one of the actors of the fraternity (brotherhood) listed to be deported of the camp des Milles (10 km distant from Aix).

His struggle to save lives from the death trains that took 1928 men, women and children to Auschwitz via Drancy between August 6th and 13th of the year 1942 awarded him and his wife the honorary title of Righteous among the Nations. The narration he made about these dreadful days bears testimony in a very moving way.

### A living bond

As a place set up at a crossroad of common history, as a place attesting of a drama engraved in the marble of a simple souvenir plate, the temple in rue Villars has not been dedicated solely to the past though. On the opposite, this building is, nowadays, promoting the hopefulness of the present time.

As a blessing and renewal sign, both the Jewish and Protestant communities that found shelter in the temple have expanded. Since the temple dedication on 7<sup>th</sup> April of 1957, the Reformed Church of France parish has developed with new believers coming to Aix and its district. As to the Israelite community, they started to receive in 1958 Jews from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. This revival enabled Mr. Darius Milhaud to preside in 1971 the new synagogue inauguration.

While the bonds developed during the hardships of the second war for the sake of freedom of faith and human dignity have never ceased, the Judeo-Christian friendship association initiated in 1948 by Jules Isaac, an historian, has reinforced the powerful special impact originated from this religious structure that is welcoming you today: to be an interfaith temple of reconciliation.