

The



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Portland Observer

42

years of
community service

'City of Roses'



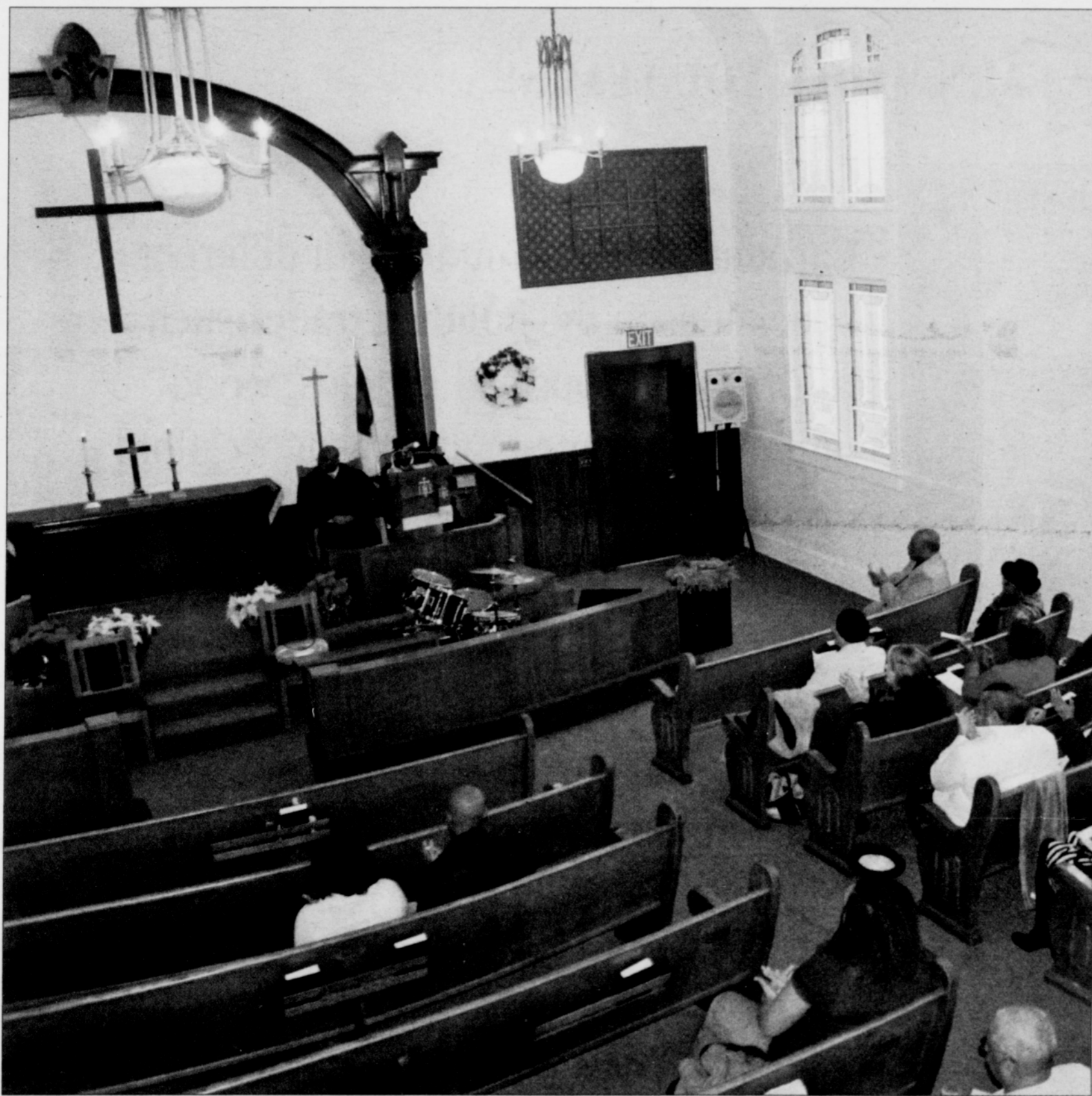
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Established in 1970

Committed to Cultural Diversity



Phillis Whitmore gives praise to God with the touch of her musical talents as First A.M.E. Zion Church Pianist and Minister of Music. The oldest black church in Portland is celebrating its 150th anniversary.

PHOTOS BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

As it has for 150 years, a recent Sunday service draws local residents to the pews of First A.M.E. Zion Church, the first black church in Portland. When it first opened as the 'People's Church' in another location in downtown Portland in 1862, the congregation was the first African-American church north of San Francisco.

Later, the church became known as "First Church," which many local residents refer to it as today. Several relocations moved the congregation to the east side of the Willamette River. Then on April 21, 1968, hundreds from the black community marched to its present location from a church on North Williams. The march will be re-enacted during the weekend anniversary celebration, April 12-15.

Generations of First A.M.E. Zion members have witnessed and survived some of history's most pivotal movements: the Civil War, slavery and its Emancipation; world wars and the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan; the Columbia River Vanport Flood; the Civil Rights Movement; and the Inauguration of President Obama.

"First Church has been a beacon of hope for many, many years," said The Rev. Robert N. Probasco Sr., First A.M.E. Zion's senior pastor, and a local pastor for 21 years.

Today, there are about 120 members of the church, for which about 70 attend service every Sunday. Most of the members are elders, and some are house-bound and receive regular visits from the ministry, which includes Bishop Rev. Dr. Dennis V. Proctor, Presiding Elder Rev. Robert F. Kemp, The Rev. Edie Jolly-Bryant, and preacher Maury A. Sails.

Gentrification has stretched thin the once largely African-American population residing in the vicinity of the church. Bars and restaurants have replaced familiar homes around the corner. Funerals for victims of gang violence are nearly

Living History

First Church turns 150

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

This year marks a significant milestone for the oldest African-American church in Portland and one of the oldest black congregations in the Pacific Northwest.

In April, Portland's First A.M.E. Zion Church, located on

the corner of North Vancouver Avenue and Skidmore Street, will celebrate its 150th anniversary.

When it first opened in 1862 on "A" Street, downtown, which is now Ankeny Street, the church's birth was just three years after Oregon reached statehood.

At the time, it was called the "People's Church," the first African-American congregation north of San Francisco, though connected nationally to its mother and sister churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

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