Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming to this memorial service for a beloved man - a husband, a father, a grandfather, a brother, an uncle - Rabbi, Solomon B. Acrish. As I look out over a sea of sad faces, I see some of our Rabbi’s fellow clergy: Cantor Debbie Katchko-Gray, Rabbi Reiner, and Rabbi Haddon. Sheriff Donald Smith is also here; he has been with us for so many happy times, and he is here today. If there is anybody else I should have pointed out, please forgive me. Thank you for joining us today and bringing the comfort of your presence.

Today we are remembering a truly great man, a man who was larger than life, a man who devoted his life to caring for others, a man with incredible personal charisma, great intelligence, remarkable linguistic ability, an amazing memory, a teacher for life, a lover of children, and a man of great faith: Rabbi Solomon B. Acrish.  Our service today will be a little unusual, mainly because it was actually prepared by our beloved Rabbi himself. The participants and the parts of the service they will read were all selected by Sol Acrish. For the most part the participants are the people who helped the Temple through this difficult time by filling in for him at Bar or Bat Mitzvah services and tutoring and Shabbat services for the past year and a half.

I was privileged to work closely with this extraordinary man for 28 years.  I had a front row seat observing someone whose entire life’s work was helping others. When he realized how ill he was, Sol Acrish got busy thinking about others. Many of his last hours were spent worrying about and caring for us. With respect to his family, he worried about his beloved wife, Terri and tried to make things as easy for her as he could. Terri, he loved you and I hope you know we are all here ready to help you adjust to life without him in any way we can. Sol’s son, Brian, was a source of great joy, and he loved him wholeheartedly. Years back, after his son Kevin passed away, Sol was truly heartbroken, and his world seemed to turn gray for a long time. When his grandson Max was born, the sun came back out for Sol. Then came Harry and Lily who were like the most beautiful icing on the most beautiful cake. His face lit up when he spoke about Brian and his three grandchildren. When I first met Sol (aka THE RABBI) so many years ago, his favorite expression seemed to be, “God will provide,” and somehow God did provide! But in more recent years, when we spoke of our plans, his face would light up with a smile, and he’d say his new favorite saying: “Brian and the kids are coming up this weekend.” Brian, Max, Harrison and Lily, you are his legacy, and he will live on through all of you. Did you guys ever realize that if your father or grandfather was a great man, you four probably inherited some of his greatness?

And speaking of greatness, let’s talk about Albert - best brother ever! You couldn’t have been more helpful, loyal and devoted. The love between you and your brother was easy to see. Sol also loved his sisters, Terri’s siblings, his nieces and nephews, and his great-nieces and nephews. Those family relationships were the core of his life.

If Sol Acrish’s family was the core of his life, Temple Beth Elohim provided his purpose. He lived for Judaism, and his desire was to convey Judaism and see it continue through to future generations.

He loved that he officiated at B’nei Mitzvah for multiple generations in the same families, and we know it is unbelievably rare for a Rabbi to spend 50 years with the same congregation. It is amazing how many people have phoned and emailed asking how he is doing and praying for his health. Towards the end, we were besieged by the inquiries, and so many people mentioned that they felt like their children were losing a grandfather or they were losing an uncle. He became a part of everyone’s family with his charismatic personality, and his way of forging specific and meaningful relationships with each and every person with whom he came in contact. Nobody who has been involved with Sunday school can ever forget the image of our Rabbi standing outside and greeting each and every child by name on Sunday mornings.

For the family of Temple Beth Elohim, he left a final message, and I quote: “I am grateful for having had the privilege of leading the congregation for 50 years and am very grateful for your support and love.”  To the family of Temple Beth Elohim this Temple is his other legacy and a visible result of his life’s work. Let’s face it, we are going to go through some difficult times moving forward without him. It will take time, but we are truly a Temple family and a unique community, and we will find our way.

Always thinking of you, he asked me to contact Rabbi Gold and Adam Payne and ask them if they would be willing to offer grief counseling for the members of Temple Beth Elohim, and they both willingly agreed. You both helped ease his mind about his beloved congregation.

Then he asked me to do one last thing for him, and that was to help him put together the service for his funeral.  You may think this request was highly unusual, God knows I did, but so, apparently, was Sol Acrish!  His reasoning was that all his mentors and the Rabbis who were his contemporaries with whom he had been close have passed away.

He requested that Robin and Richard provide the music and was quite specific when he spoke to them about it. I would have done anything he asked to ease his mind, but I couldn’t sleep for fear that this service wouldn’t truly be worthy of the man. Rabbi Laurie Gold was good enough to look things over and make sure everything was as it should be. She was able to confirm that, as ill as he was, our Rabbi set up the service beautifully. I am extremely grateful to Rabbi Gold for her thoughtful suggestions and encouragement.

We are all experiencing a profound loss, and that’s okay. We can’t expect it to be easy to mourn a man who meant so much to so many. So what do we do? The best I can think of is to try to remember the lessons he taught us and how fortunate we were to have known him. Serenity in the face of adversity; the wisdom of the Torah; care for each other, reach out when someone is in need, deal with people honestly, and strive for tikkun olam, healing the world one little bit at a time. Even though he will no longer stand before us in person and tell stories about Sam Schwartz and other odd characters, even though we won’t be able to see him or speak to him, or ask for his advice, we can remember what this teacher for life taught us. Then he will live forever in our memories and our hearts, and he will guide us through the rest of our lives. Thank you.