

From: Phil Sher

Date: September 11, 2019 at 9:03:41 PM CDT

Subject: update

Good evening,

As promised, I am sending everyone a quick update as to the status of the shul and Congregation.

The shul (building) is a complete loss. An investigation was made to determine the cause of the fire. The investigation was made by the Duluth Police, Duluth Fire Department, and the ATF. No final determination has yet been made, but I have worked with them (slightly as I had knowledge of the structure of the building, etc), and impressed by their knowledge and courtesy.

Most items were lost. We had 14 Torahs. 10 were pulled by the fireman from the building. The firemen were fantastic. They carefully wrapped each Torah in a plastic bag to prevent damage. These were the Torahs from the downstairs Ahron Kodesh. Unfortunately the Torahs were already wet from the fire hoses (a necessity), which caused some damage. I am trained to inspect Torahs. I believe to properly inspect these Torahs it will take me many months. I know of one, certainly, that is no longer kosher. I believe there are a few that are fine. Again, it will take some time.

The upstairs ark was incinerated, along with contents. We had four Torahs upstairs. So far, there is no sign on them. They may be ash, or buried under the remains of the ark and the roof, which had collapsed.

For those of you who well remember, in the ark, at the right, there was a door in which we had other scrolls. These were not Torahs. These were NACH (neviim and k'suvim", which are the prophets and writings. These were written by a sofer on chlaf. I had done my bar mitzvah mafter out of one of these a few years ago. Louis Cohen, z'l, had told me that the 'older men' used to use these when Louis was young. That's a few years ago ! Due to the scarcity of these, they were very valuable. To the best of my knowledge, none survived.

Of the Torahs that survived, the mantels, although some looked good, were soaked and wreaked of ash. The mantels are unuseable. We are seeking mantels and will purchase some.

We did save our shofar, two yads, the plaque on the back wall downstairs with the original members signatories to found the shul, two yearzeit boards (of 6), and some files.

No one may enter into the building now as it is unsafe. All of the weight of the roof (which collapsed), ark (which collapsed) pews, etc, lay on the floor of the upstairs, along with the weight of the water from the firefights, as well as rain. Downstairs, it appears as if the support beams may buckle.

When the building is demolished, we will work with crews to attempt to salvage more.

We are NOT seeking money. We do have insurance and await a final disposition. We may be poor, or come out financially whole. My suspicion is that we will be able to continue.

Still, the loss is profound. Many items gone. Memories gone. Valuables gone.

For now, we will meet in homes for minyan. For example, I have a yahrzeit for my father, z'l, next Wed. The minyan will be at my old home. I'm happy to host for such services, as well as Shabbos.

We are arranging to have Yom Tov services. More on this later.

We will make no determination as to our future until after all of the yom tovim (including Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah). I assume we will continue.

Finally, the outpouring of good will has been incredible. Again, I cannot call everyone. 200 calls in three days. The press has been fairly good (my personal suggestion is that CNN is not worth watching....I did not previously believe, but now believe in 'fake news').

Rabbi Goldberger of Knesseth has arranged for us to have machzorim and chumashim. Rabbi Merkin in NJ (a personal friend and great man) is providing vital assistance in a variety of means. We have had offers of providing seforim, etc., from Des Moines, and elsewhere. I think we'll be fine.

If people desire, I will send more information in the future.

For now, that's the update.

All the best,

Phil Sher

PS. I may write a book of the history of the shul, if I ever have the time. Perhaps that would be a good fund raiser, if needed.