



FIRES

Suspect arrested in Duluth synagogue fire

City officials will meet the media Sunday to discuss the arrest and "the conclusion" of the investigation into the fire that destroyed the synagogue belonging to Adas Israel Congregation. Written By: [Brady Slater](#) | Sep 13th 2019 - 4pm.



The Adas Israel Congregation synagogue burns Monday morning, Sept. 9, in Duluth. (Submitted by Devin Garner)

A suspect has been arrested in the fire that destroyed the Adas Israel Congregation synagogue in Duluth earlier this week.

The city of Duluth called a Sunday morning press conference "regarding the arrest of Adas Israel Synagogue fire suspect and fire investigation conclusion," a Friday news release said. Originally set for Saturday, the press conference was rescheduled in order to observe the Jewish Sabbath, or Shabbat.

A 36-year-old man was being held in St. Louis County jail as of Friday, pending a felony charge of first-degree arson. The News Tribune generally does not name suspects who have not yet been charged.

Officials with the city declined to offer any further details. The news conference will include Mayor Emily Larson, Police Chief Mike Tusken and Fire Chief Shawn Krizaj, the city said.

News of the synagogue burning to the ground has spread throughout the world and drawn lots of attention on social media. Late Friday, a leading regional Jewish advocacy group addressed the latest news, thanking authorities for an investigation leading to an arrest and for moving their announcement off of the Jewish Sabbath.

"We became aware of the arrest heading into Shabbat and will continue working with the Duluth Police Department to inform the Jewish community of the nature of this arrest as the investigation continues," Steve Hunegs, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, said in a statement Friday. "We will await issuing further comment until charges are filed. We wish the Duluth Jewish community a peaceful and restful Shabbat as we continue to offer our full support."

A large and intense investigation into the cause of the fire has stretched through the week, drawing on an estimated 20 investigators with the Duluth police and fire departments, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. That particular federal agency gets involved when a house of worship is burned.

Firefighters were called to the synagogue (302 E. Third St.) after 2:30 a.m., Monday. Suppression efforts inside the building were called off after the structure began to collapse. Authorities have held two press conferences in the wake of the fire, saying they'd identified new clues on Tuesday.

Authorities have not yet revealed who is in custody or what charges the person is facing.

Members of the congregation were also declining to talk in advance of the news conference.

The Adas Israel Congregation synagogue is home to a "shul" of Modern Orthodox Jewish families. Built in 1901, the synagogue is the last of its kind in the Northland. To worship in the Modern Orthodox Jewish faith is to practice Jewish law while living out modern lives.

New York author Sarah Rose is a descendant of one of the synagogue's founders and told the News Tribune this week, "We hope it's not our worst nightmare."

"The most terrifying image to any Jew anywhere is a synagogue on fire," she said. "It is what our nightmares look like."

Rose called Duluth her ancestral home. She visited relatives and the synagogue often on trips from her childhood home in Chicago.

"There was no place kinder and more welcoming for Jews than the Upper Midwest," Rose said. "The thought this might be intentional and a hate crime is horrifying."

The Jewish community in Duluth has dwindled since its historic roots. According to "Stories and Legacies of Some Jewish Immigrants to the Twin Ports," **the late Bob Goldish** wrote that Jews began to populate the Twin Ports in 1871, coming from mostly Germany and Eastern Europe. Their population grew to roughly 4,000 people and by the time of his writing in 2011 had fallen to under 1,000.

According to sources this week, Adas Israel Congregation was founded by Modern Orthodox Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, some looking to avoid conscription into the army. Goldish wrote that conscription for Jewish boys, at that time and in that part of the world, could start at 14 or 15 years old and last for 25 years.

"Most were never seen again," he wrote in his nearly 100-page report, which was used as the basis of a lecture at the Duluth Art Institute.

The synagogue was home to roughly 40 families. Leaders have said the shul faces an uncertain future without its place of worship.

Tusken addressed the strain both fire and uncertainty have put on the small membership of Adas Israel Congregation.

"This has been certainly very difficult for our Jewish community to have lost this place of worship," the police chief said earlier this week. "We know that this is important not just for the city of Duluth but for that community of faith."

