

Allan Garon

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Date: Sunday, September 15, 2019 11:42 AM
To: "Garon (website) Allan" <allan@garon.us>
Subject: Fw: another shul update

Adas Israel Fire Update from Phil Sher September 14, 2019

From: Phil Sher
To:
Sent: Saturday, September 14, 2019, 09:06:39 PM PDT
Subject: another shul update

Greetings,

As promised I am sending a 'spam' update on the shul.

I don't know that I will be sending any more updates as the yom tovim are upcoming, and I doubt there will be little new news to report. Of course, I will respond to questions if asked and when possible (I'm swamped with work).

As of this writing the Duluth Police have arrested a suspect in regards to the burning of the shul. Regardless of the outcome (guilty or innocent), nothing will bring back the shul. So many items lost that a comprehensive list is difficult to make (but will be).

Briefly, the most important items lost:

We had a number of 'small scrolls' that were in the upstairs ark in a small side cabinet. Many thought these to be Torahs. They were not. These were the works of the Nevi'im (prophets), on Chlaf (parchment). Done by a sofer. I'm not an expert, but would have dated them to be about 200 years old, yet in perfect condition. For those of you who remember, we used to walk around the shul with these on Simchas Torah. I had done my bar mitzvah mafter from one of these a few years ago. These are rare. Very few exist, and, although not as important as Torahs, they are, in fact, more expensive than Torahs. The upstairs of the shul is a horrible site (I viewed the damage). Most likely these are incinerated. I doubt any trace will be found. Truly a loss as these generally speaking are not written.

Torahs: The news media reported we saved eight Torahs. This is an error. One of our members shouted to the press at a conference that this is the total. Unfortunately, this was a member who rarely (if ever) attended, and did not know. Four Torahs are lost forever (most likely incinerated), while the remaining came out. Still, I do know there is water damage. Certainly one Torah is now possel (unfit for use). I suspect others, also, may be damaged. I am trained to check and make small repairs to these, but I cannot do major repairs. Simply to check these may take many months.

Torah mantels (covers). All are ruined due to water and smoke damage (in point of fact, they STINK). No one could use these. A dry cleaner confirmed there was no hope in salvaging these.

The upstairs ark. Hand made by Scott Graff, a local company over 100 years ago, this was both unique and beautiful. A drone confirms that it is badly burned, broken (pulverized) and completely demolished.

All of the upstairs pews. While viewing, I found four pews still standing (including the one where Maury Krovitz, z'l, sat, but these are black cinders that will collapse if touched. All others are ash.

Stained glass. Anyone having seen these know their beauty and uniqueness (one had an inset of a portion of the Torah that contained the 10 commandments). Irreplaceable. I saw as these melted, fell, and were destroyed. As the 8 foot Star of David melted and fell to the street with a glow from the flames, I felt as if it was during the Holocaust.

The Eitz Hayim (filials that go atop the Torah's handles), and silver breast plates.

Downstairs. Some fire damage as hot embers fell from the ceiling and burned some tables, books, and tallis. Massive water damage. Most of the siddurim, machzorim, and gemorrah are water logged, smoke damaged, and unusable. We will need to bury these.

I could go on, but I am certain people understand.

What was saved:

Louie Cohen's, z'l, kiddush cup and wine bottle (minus his mixed twenty year old wine). Undoubtedly this will follow the Congregation wherever we go.

A yahrzeit book that was hand written prior to when we had boards.

Circa 1974, Rabbi Schwartz, z'l, made a catalog of the then attendees names and hebrew names. We have this.

Some yads were lost, but we have the yad that was used most often and every Shabbos.

Gordy Cohen's tallis and bag

A siddur donated by Art and Eve Markus to the shul (Howie, send me your address and it will be on the way to you).

The articles of incorporation that were framed and signed by the founders hanging on the wall behind the 'back davening table' downstairs.

The photo of the men in 1914 is missing. No worries, I have a full size copy and a copy negative as well as the names of the men in the photo.

The photo of the men in 1994 is ruined. Again, no worries, I have the negative and know the names.

Please understand that we will NOT attempt to save personal items, including my own. This is heart breaking, but necessary. For example, someone called wanting us to save a table cover that had been donated. If the table cover still exists it is little more than a rag. I know this as all the table covers are now rags. The building is unstable and 'creaking'. I fear the downstairs ceiling will collapse. We have boarded up all possible entrances to the building excepting the top rubble which would be impossible. The building now may be dangerous.

We have been prohibited from removing the building as the police and fed government had impounded the building for purposes of investigation. The building was released to us on Thursday. We now must await many permits (and testing by environmental standards for purposes of ascertaining means of disposal) before removing the building. We are working as best as we are able to remove the building so to remove a possible public source of danger.

I do have many photos of the building's interior which I will share when I am able.

What's next:

I have been informed a suspect has been apprehended. I believe I know how the police found the culprit. Still, there is no compensation (emotionally) for the loss. So many bar mitzvahs, weddings (my own, included), events, and minyans. I believe the record number of minyans anyone attended throughout the history of the shul was Louis Cohen, z'l, who I calculate attended 60,000 minyanim. By contrast, I've done about 6000.

We will continue to meet. Personally, I have a yahrzeit this week. Minyan in my home will be held. I hope to keep my home open to all yahrzeits as well as Shabbos if we can make a minyan.

Yom tov: we are arranging to rent a hall at a hotel, along with a block of rooms. This will be for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I hope, also, to do this for Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. If we cannot gain a hall for the latter holy days, again, I offer my home (perhaps we may find somewhere else, also), but, obviously due to size, there will not be so much dancing .

Note: the media (excepting CNN) has been kind, understanding, professional but incessant. They desire to attend our services as well as many well wishers. If everyone who desires to come attends, we will be swamped with people (possibly hundreds) and be hampered in our smaller quarters to provide a proper service. For that reason we are not advertising our location. We are notifying our members. We are certainly open to our members and ongoing friends. If you, or yours, wish to attend, please contact either David or me so that we may ensure enough space. Due to the abundance of telephone calls, please, emails are best.

Beyond yom tovim: Nothing is set in stone. There has been a suggestion upon which, I believe, we will decide how to proceed. There are many suggestions (doubtless, many more to come) as to what we will do. Personally, I think we will somehow have our own new shul, although, most likely, somewhat smaller.

Also, until a permanent home is found, we have a benefactor who may be willing to enable us to have continuing services at a hotel (as we will do on yom tov) on occasional Shabbosim., as well as my home. If anyone desires to come here for a minyan on Shabbos, please contact me well in advance so to ascertain whether we will be making a minyan, and location (again, if in a hotel, it's always nice to stay in the same place). Still, as nice as this is, we need a SHUL. Given the weather in Duluth (we call the Twin Cities, northern Florida, after all)...we have WINTER here...I doubt any search for a permanent home may begin until the fall.

Finally, As you know I put out the shul bulletin after Gordy Cohen, z'l, had to step down from that task. Gordy had back issues dating years back, and I kept copies of all of the issues I put out (for 22 years). These contain listings of events, yahrzeits, etc. Again, someday, most likely before I retire as I plan upon working another 11 years, I hope to write a book.....

Again, if people wish, I'll try to send out photos.

One last note: Many people have reached out to help, including calls from the Israeli Embassy, our congressman, former members, local churches, local charitable organizations, Dougherty Funeral Home (who provided office space and yarmulkes and who are willing to provide more), Hodroff Funeral Home, Rabbi Goldberger of Keneset in Mpls, Rabbi Greenberg of Bayis Yisroel, Rabbi Merkin (a friend of mine who works for Torah U'Mesorah, who 'has connections'), and a congregation in Des Moines, IA. Their help has been invaluable. We thank them.

If anyone wishes to know anything specific please write to me. I'll try to answer all questions in a upcoming update.

The ruins (sorry to include, but I do wish to impress upon people the impossibility of recovery and to NOT get near to the site until removal and cleanup are effected.

