

A Fire at “Raim Ahuvim”, the Revered Wynnfield Shul, does not Demoralize its Members

When the earliest minyan in town assembled at Congregation “Raim Ahuvim” last Wednesday at 6:25 a.m., its members were confronted with the gruesome sight of innumerable broken windows on the two upper floors of their shul. Smoke filled the air. The congregants were informed that a fire broke out shortly after midnight that had gutted the second and third floors of the building, but left the main floor intact. Given that the actual *makom tefilah* on the main floor was still available, there was immediate consensus that the morning minyan should proceed.

In order to avoid exposing the members of the minyan to hazardous smells and mold spores in the aftermath of the fire, and to facilitate the clean-up, the morning minyan was invited by “Aish Hatorah” to temporarily hold its services on its premises. On Shabbos, Marvin and Leah Gornish graciously hosted the minyan in their home next to the shul.

As it turned out, the extent of destruction by the fire was of a lesser magnitude than was initially feared. Only one room in the annex of the building was burnt, and pending final results of the fire investigation, it looks like the fire started in this back room. However, to fight the fire the roof of the annex and the roof above an adjacent room had to be hacked open. In addition, in the effort to extinguish the fire as swiftly as possible, all 42 windows of the second and third floor – with only one exception -- were broken.

In terms of fixing the damage, the shul faces almost insurmountable challenges because, due to financial shortfalls, the fire insurance was discontinued about a year ago for the sake of paying substantial heating bills. The good news is that the clean-up is proceeding well. Electricity in the shul and in the Men’s Mikvah is already restored and a potentially hazardous carpet was removed from the *makom tefilah*. Members are still hopeful that the revered “Austro-Hungarian Congregation” can be revived by fixing the windows and the limited roof damage and are asking for donations to be sent to: Cong. Raim Ahuvim, c/o Marvin Gornish, President, 5850 Drexel Road, Philadelphia, PA 19131.