

Temple declares loan woes

B'nai Torah urges members to donate

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BOCA RATON — Congregation B'nai Torah leaders have declared a state of financial emergency, telling congregants the synagogue may have to close unless \$1 million is raised for loan and operating expenses.

The synagogue is in default of its payments on a \$4.3 million NCNB loan, which had been reduced to nearly \$4 million before the crisis.

"We want people to understand the seriousness of this situation," temple president Jeffrey Deutch said in defense of a strongly worded letter sent to members last week.

The synagogue's board of directors is asking each family to donate at least \$2,500 to meet the crisis. There are 490 families in the synagogue. Of those, 50 congregants have pledged \$25,000 for the loan and contributed about \$70,000 more to carry the synagogue through this month.

The letter spoke of a lack of substantial contributions despite Boca Raton's wealth and referred to the appearance of "expensive automobiles" that fill the congregation's parking lot during high holy days.

The per capita donations from the congregation are "embarrassingly" less than those of other Jewish and Christian congregations, the letter said.

Synagogue members pay \$750 and are assessed \$3,500 over a seven-year period for the building fund, Deutch said.

He defended the dues as necessary to meet the costs of the new building.

Assessments alone are not intended to meet all the needs of the synagogue, Deutch said.

"That's a basic amount, and people can volunteer pledges in excess of it," he said.

B'nai Torah's new building at 6261 SW 18th St. has seating for 567 people. It has a full catering hall, an administrative wing, a chapel and an after-school-program wing.

"The synagogue had hoped that once the building was finished and people saw how beautiful it was, the contributions would increase and new membership would increase," synagogue attorney Ken Lipman said. "It certainly was our position that those projections were realistic, and the bank thought so, too."

Lipman said it was still hard to assess the building's attraction to new members because it has been open only since September.

Although the synagogue's financial position was no surprise to members, the letter from NCNB informing the synagogue of the defaulted payments was, Lipman said.

Synagogue officials are gingerly addressing the topic of what happens next. They are unwilling to say closing the synagogue is the only option, but they also do not name other options, besides working out an agreement with the bank.

"The leadership of the temple does not want a Band-Aid solution to the problem and four months from now be concerned about raising money again," Lipman said.

B'nai Torah is one of three Conservative synagogues in Boca Raton. One of the other two, Temple Beth Shalom, is in Century Village and its membership is limited to residents there. The other, Congregation Beth Ami, meets in B'nai Torah's old building at 1401 NW Fourth Ave.