

Texas Synagogue Update: Gunman Releases One Hostage, Standoff Remains

Update: At 6:15 p.m. Saturday, Colleyville, Texas, police released a statement saying that one male hostage was released at 5 p.m., uninjured, from inside Congregation Beth Israel, a Jewish synagogue. The statement said the man would be reunited with his family as soon as possible and does not require medical attention. FBI Crisis Negotiators continue contact with the perpetrator, the statement said, and more updates will be provided as they become available.

Local authorities northeast of Fort Worth, Texas, are negotiating with a man who apparently took several people hostage Saturday during a Jewish Shabbat service, a source close to Charisma News reports from the scene.

Mike Evans, a *New York Times* bestselling author and founder of the Friends of Zion Museum in Jerusalem, lives in the same neighborhood as Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, and reports that a SWAT operation had blocked off all entrances to Pleasant Run Road leading up to the synagogue. Evans says law enforcement blocked off and evacuated the area because the perpetrator, during the livestream of the service, was heard to say he had a bomb.

"A terrorist somehow got in and took the rabbi and the congregation hostage," says Evans, a longtime warrior against antisemitism. "On the livestream, we heard him making statements that 'We love death more than you love life.' We're not sure what country he is from, but he is definitely an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist.

"He said, 'I want to die spreading Islam,'" Evans reports. "I don't want to die in my bed. If they storm the building, then

everyone in here will die.' I never thought in my lifetime that I'd ever see a terrorist attack on the very street I live on, in a tiny little synagogue here in Colleyville, Texas."

Evans tells Charisma News he heard on the livestream, which has since been taken down from Facebook, that during the negotiations, the gunman said he wanted police to deliver to him his younger sister, who is in prison in Fort Worth.

The Associated Press reported that at least four hostages were believed to be inside the synagogue, include Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker.

The FBI and Texas Department of Safety were called to the scene at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville just before noon local time.

Prior to its removal from the internet, the feed captured muffled audio of what sounded like negotiations with police, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported Saturday.

The news outlet reported that "an angry man could be heard ranting on the livestream, at times talking about religion. The video did not show what was happening in the building. The man has repeatedly mentioned his sister and Islam and used profanities. At one point, another voice can be heard apparently talking on the phone to police. The man has said a few times he didn't want anyone hurt, and he has mentioned his children. He also said repeatedly he believes he is going to die. It's unclear how many people were in the synagogue."

There have been no reported injuries from the scene.

The AP reports that authorities are still trying to discern a precise motive for the attack, although on the livestream, "the hostage-taker was heard demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda and who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. military officers while in custody in Afghanistan. Siddiqui is

in federal prison in Texas, the AP reported.

Commenters on the livestream are offering prayers for Rabbi Cytron-Walker and the others involved. More than 8,000 viewers were watching the livestream.

The identity of the gunman is still unknown, but the man spoke with a British accent, per the Jerusalem Post.

The Associated Press reported that Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said he was closely monitoring the situation and Tweeted, "We pray for the safety of the hostages and rescuers."

Congregation Beth Israel was officially established on July 18, 1999, with 25 member families and affiliation with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now the Union of Reform Judaism. A new building with a 160-seat sanctuary opened in 2005. Cytron-Walker joined as rabbi in 2006. The synagogue also operates a religious school.

Stay tuned for updates of this breaking story from Charisma News, and please join the Charisma News team in prayer over this developing situation. {eo}

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