

Fire-hit church group looks for a new home

► Congregation of up to 200 left without a base after big blaze
 ► Massive damage caused to building dating from 1907

JON WEISGARD

A HEARTFELT plea for a new home has been made by an evangelical group after a devastating fire ripped through their church.

At its height, 80 firefighters and 20 engines tackled the blaze at the Great Commission Ministry Church which brought gridlock to Shepherds Bush.

The fire on July 29 began in a neighbouring hostel in Shepherds Bush Road, owned by the Carr-Gomm charity, and quickly spread to the church, which was built in 1907. Structural engineers were able to stabilise the building after the blaze by erecting scaffolding.

But while life has now returned to normal in Shepherds Bush, the Great Commission Ministry have found themselves homeless and are asking anyone who may be able to help find them a new venue to get in touch.

Daniel Makonnen, church director and facility manager, said: "It had taken us 12 years to find this building so we are all devastated by the fire.

"It looks as if a bomb has hit the church. The sanctuary has been covered by a tent for the last 12 years but the fire and the water has now ripped that apart. There is nothing salvageable in the building and the organ is ruined.

"We desperately need to find a new home and we really want to stay in the borough", added Mr Makonnen, of Uxbridge Road.

"We held last Sunday's service at St Stephen's Church in Westbourne Park Road and we are eternally grateful to the church for coming to our rescue.

"I am very keen to hear from anyone who may be able to help us."

The church holds services from 7.30pm-10.30pm on Fridays and Tuesdays and attracts a congregation of up to 200 people for their Sunday service. A musical practice is also held on Saturdays from noon to 7pm.

While the fire caused widespread disruption across west London, it also saw the Shepherds Bush community pull together.

Soon after the scale of the blaze became apparent, H&F Council teamed up with the Charecroft Tenant Residents' Association and transformed the Charecroft community hall into a temporary refuge for those hostel residents displaced by the fire.

Dina Hudson, of the Charecroft Tenant Residents' Association, said: "It's in times of crisis when people pull together and we were more than happy to open up the community hall.

"We worked together with the council and the emergency services during the hours of need and we were just glad to do our part.

"I was hugely impressed with



DAMAGE: Minister Josefina Bolor and Daniel Makonnen from the Great Commission Ministry Church survey the state of the Shepherds Bush building after the fire (left)
 PICTURE BY LEIGH QUINNELL



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the overall response to the fire. Everyone was doing their bit to make things more comfortable for those who needed help.

"We even had local businesses

offering food packages to the hall which was very touching. It was a long and trying day but I left the site knowing that the community had clubbed together when it mattered most."

The Red Cross was also on the scene, providing medical assistance and reassurance.

Jonathan Edmondson, the British Red Cross emergency response operations manager, said: "We can never be sure of the scale of an incident when we are called out.

"The volunteers did a fantastic job supporting residents and we are very glad to have been able to help them.

"We are always ready to

respond to help vulnerable people in incidents like this, and our volunteers' training in practical and emotional support means that we have the skills to help people effectively when they need it most."

Carr-Gomm had ensured that all hostel residents were taken to alternative accommodation by the end of the day.

A 36-year-old woman has now been charged with arson with intent to endanger life and arson where life was endangered.

• If you may be able to provide the church with a new base, call Mr Makonnen on 07971 076 368 or the newsdesk on 020 8732 2163.

FIRE DRAMA >>



• These images were taken at the height of the blaze in Shepherds Bush Road on July 29 by h&f news production editor Tom Derbyshire