Rabbi Joseph Bronstein came to Congregation Judea in Hollywood more than three years ago to try to save the ailing Orthodox shul. Now, it looks like the storefront synagogue that has served Jews in the Carriage Hills neighborhood for 31 years will close by the end of August.

"We revitalized to a certain degree," Bronstein said, explaining that he was able to increase membership from 12 families to around 50. But there are fewer elderly Jewish residents in the neighborhood now, he said, and the synagogue's location makes it hard to attract new members.

Then there's the ailing economy. "People are just not donating," Bronstein said. "They're afraid to give. I'm having a hard time to carry the shul."

The synagogue has no expenses, except for rent and electricity, said Bronstein, who doesn't receive a salary. "And yet we can't make it," he said." It's tough. It's a real nonprofit organization."

Bronstein, 57, lives in Miami Beach but on Shabbat he stays in an apartment the synagogue rents within walking distance of the shul.

"It's an Orthodox shul for unorthodox people," Bronstein joked. Most worshipers are Reform or Conservative Jews who like his Modern Orthodox services and teaching, he said. "Everything is explained and explored. They love it. It's a small shul but we do a lot. We really accomplish a lot."

Bronstein said Congregation Judea wants to stay open but would consider merging with "any Orthodox shul."

"A lot of congregations are struggling financially now," said Frederick Greenspahn, Gimelstob Eminent Scholar of Judaic Studies at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton and an ordained rabbi.

People who moved to an area 20 or 30 years ago are dying and South Florida is not getting the influx of retirees it used to, he said. Synagogues that didn't have a big base can't afford to lose a lot of members, Greenspahn added.

About four months ago Beth Ahm Israel, a Conservative synagogue in Cooper City, sold its
building to the Korean Presbyterian Church and moved into rented space at the David Posnack JCC in Davie.

"We're alive and well," Mark Weber, Beth Ahm Israel president, said. "We reduced overhead to be sure we'd stay alive and well. Had we not changed, we probably would be out of business ourselves."

A few years ago synagogue leaders realized the temple's financial path eventually would make it insolvent, Weber said. "Expenditures were higher than revenue."

Beth Ahm Israel opened 20 years ago, "built for a large congregation and growth," to accommodate 700-800 families, Weber said. The congregation now has about 260 families, he said, and plans to stay at the JCC for at least two years until "we sort out our strategic future."

"It's a sad situation," said Jack Leitman, 70, of Pembroke Pines, co-chair of Congregation Judea's advisory committee. "We need $15,000. We're half way there. The $15,000 probably can buy us three or four months." The synagogue needs a benefactor or benefactors, he said.

The crisis comes at a particularly bad time, a few weeks before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Leitman said, making it difficult to plan for the High Holidays.