

Holocaust Memorial Day 2019

Torn from home



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY 27/1

*A resource for churches
produced by the
the Council of Christians and Jews*



What is Holocaust Memorial Day?

27 January is the day for everyone to remember the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and the millions of people killed under Nazi Persecution, and in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur.

27 January marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp.

In the UK, thousands of local events and activities take place every year – each one an opportunity for people to reflect on those whose lives were changed beyond recognition, and to challenge prejudice, discrimination, and hatred in our own society today.

On HMD, we all have a role to play to ensure that we learn the lessons of the past, to create a safer, better future.

How to use this resource

This resource is produced by the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) with the support of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMMDT). It is designed for use by Christians in a worship setting on Holocaust Memorial Day or a Sunday close to Holocaust Memorial Day. It is not a complete service liturgy but it includes a suggested liturgy for an act of commemoration within Christian worship. Commentaries are provided on the readings set for Sunday 27th January 2019, referencing the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: *Torn from home*. The resource can be adapted as necessary for your own context, however it is hoped that it will provide inspiration and guidance so that church communities can remember the Holocaust, Nazi persecution, and subsequent genocides, as a fundamental part of their Christian witness and discipleship.

CCJ is grateful to alumni of their annual seminars at the International School of Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem, who have contributed to this resource.

Outline of the resource

This resource follows the below structure. Please use it as you see fit for your community.

- Why should Christians observe Holocaust Memorial Day?
- An opening reflection
- Prayers
- Poetry
- Testimonies you can read aloud
- Reflections on the lectionary for 27 January 2019
- Questions to consider and further resources



Why should Christians mark HMD?

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) encourages Christian communities—churches, clergy, individual practicing Christians—to observe Holocaust Memorial Day.

This is for two reasons. Firstly, there is the historical and the theological. A Christian in a post-Holocaust world cannot ignore the Holocaust. The reality that 6 million Jews were murdered by people who were mostly baptised Christians, and who lived in Christian societies, has an unavoidable impact on the Christian's personal faith. Secondly, there is the personal and the political. There is a Christian duty to hear and give space to human story—the experience of Holocaust victims and survivors should be a large part of that—and because of the related Christian duty to reshape the world in love for all people. The fact that on HMD we remember subsequent genocides as well is a reminder that people of faith are called to witness in the world as it is, and to work to prevent the onset of hatred which tears people from homes.

So what does the 2019 theme *torn from home* mean in a context of Christians observing Holocaust Memorial Day?

It is likely that you will use this resource in a church building. This setting, this space has an important thing to say about the theme 'torn from home'. Because a church is supposed to be a 'home'. It is God's house. Our church congregations are families where the individual worshipper is welcomed and encouraged to feel at home. God's love is a familial presence. Christians—and Jews—are taught that every human being is created in God's image. 'Home' is critical in a Christian context.

And the Christian understanding of 'home' has important things to bear on how we encourage you to observe Holocaust Memorial Day 2019. Firstly, in terms of how churches remember the Holocaust. There are many things we could say from a Christian point of view about loss of home during the Holocaust. If church as a space represents home, we could ask where was that home when church doors were closed when people sought refuge? Christians could also consider whether Church was still a home when church

buildings were used in some cases in Eastern Europe as spaces where Jews were collected before being deported or murdered. It is important to help Christians look squarely at the uncomfortable history, of other Christians who failed to provide a home for those who needed it or indeed at the examples of those few who did provide a home, but to do so in a way which does not shy away from the complicated nature of history.

Secondly, by remembering how the Christian understanding of 'home' was destroyed in the Holocaust, churches can be encouraged to look critically at the world around us today, to acknowledge the failings of different societies in subsequent genocides, and to commit to a world which has learned from the horrors of the past. With the theme *torn from home* in mind, churches can encourage their community to ask questions: what does home mean in a world where communities are increasingly divided and where all of us increasingly shut ourselves away in private echo chambers? What does it mean to be 'torn from home' in a world facing the biggest trend of forced migration since the Second World War? Can places of worship and community buildings be 'home' when people fear persecution?

Part of our response to HMD's theme for 2019 is to encourage Christians and people of all faith communities to pose these questions. *Torn from home* asks serious things about history and memory but it also calls on all of us to make the world today a home for everyone.

Rob Thompson
Senior Programme Manager, CCJ

An opening reflection and prayer

We gather to remember what many of us have never experienced or seen.

But we have heard that millions were torn from home, removed from all that was familiar, and relocated with an orchestrated cruelty that stretches the mind. We have seen the evidence. We have heard the witness.

Today, we remember, and share the silence of remembering together:

We who dwell in security cannot imagine the horror of being uprooted in uncertainty.

We who enjoy comfort cannot comprehend the depths of pain.

We who seek to know still struggle to understand how it came to be: that humanity could become so inhuman.

Millions of Jews and others were torn from their home, uprooted.

But they will not be torn from our memory.

Today, they have a home in the silence of our shared remembering.

Silence

A prayer to follow silence

Heavenly Father,
whose many gifts include memory and empathy:
we hold in remembrance before you those many of the Jewish people
who were murdered, harmed, or displaced in the horror of Nazi persecution,
and whose communities were destroyed.
In your mercy, help us to learn to accept our differences without fear
and cleanse our hearts of all hatred.
So may every human community flourish and every home be secure,
to the advancement of your loving purposes
and the glory of your name.

Amen.



Joan Salter, child survivor of the Holocaust

Joan Salter is a child survivor of the Holocaust. This photograph was taken in her dining room.

Suggested prayers

A prayer of commitment:

O God,
for those of us who haven't experienced it,
we cannot really imagine what it is like to go through such an atrocity as the
Holocaust or other genocides,
but may Jesus' manifesto,
to proclaim release to the captives and let the oppressed go free,
be our manifesto.

Help us to be alert to the insidious creep of the type of propaganda
that led to Jewish people and other victims of genocide being seen as
sub-human, dispensable.

Help us overcome any fear and apathy
and grant us the courage to speak and act in the face of evil.

Help us to imagine the world as you would have it be
and to strive for it no matter how impossible that might appear.

Help us truly to be the body of Christ,
living in tune with your will for the whole of humanity.
In his name we pray.

Amen.

A prayer for use in secondary schools:

Lord Jesus, on this special day we pray for the victims of the Holocaust

We pray in thanksgiving for the survivors, for their lives, and their witness
to the horrors they experienced. We pray that what happened in those dark
years may never be forgotten, so that new generations may be warned
against the rise of evil and prejudice, and intolerance of others.

In our school we thank you for those who teach us especially in History and Religious Education. Help us to give every attention to the values for our future lives which come from our faith. May we never forget what History teaches us about making decisions and our responsibilities as citizens.

We ask you today to bless our Jewish brothers and sisters.

We ask this for Jesus Christ's sake,

Amen.



Pictured: the Kindertransport

A prayer of confession

There should be a pause after voice 1, a briefer pause after voice 2, and a silence after voice 3.

Voice 1: 'Be still, and know that I am God!' [Psalm 46.10]

Voice 2: Forgive, we beg, the haste that leads us to forget your presence in our world and its peoples.

Voice 3: Grant us the confidence to pause and ponder your image in those we encounter.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' [Luke 10.27]

Voice 2: Forgive, we beg, the limits we have placed on love.

Voice 3: Grant us the imagination and the desire to extend the boundaries we have set that we may encompass all within our sphere of concern and care.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.' [Deuteronomy 30.19]

Voice 2: Forgive, we beg, the decisions we have made that have wrought havoc and destruction.

Voice 3: Grant us the courage to stand and speak for what brings life and joy.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'Consider whether the light in you is not darkness.' [Luke 11.35]

Voice 2: Forgive, we beg, the carelessness that fails to recognise the full consequences of our actions.

Voice 3: Grant us the discernment that enables us to act at all times with integrity.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known.' [Isaiah 48.6]

Voice 2: Forgive us, we beg, the arrogance that leads us to think that we know all there is to know.

Voice 3: Grant us the humility which allows for growth of understanding so that we remain open to new possibilities.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.' [Luke 11.4]

Voice 2: If only this were true. If only we could forgive all who have, or whom we have perceived to have, done us wrong. If only our grudges weren't so deep and rigid. If only the anger didn't grow within us. If only our desire for retribution weren't so strong. If only we could forgive.

Voice 3: Grant us the faith that allows us to believe in your forgiveness.

Silence.

Voice 1: 'Then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you.' [2 Chronicles 6.39]

Thanks be to God,

Amen.

Closing prayer

As we go from this house of prayer into a world of challenge and change

We remember the pain of the past.

As we obey God's commandments and follow Christ's way,

We recognise life's need for love.

As we seek the truth and glimpse God in all people and all places,

We go, to make the world a home for everyone.

Amen.

Poetry

The Butterfly

He was the last. Truly the last.
Such yellowness was bitter and blinding
Like the sun's tear shattered on stone.
That was his true colour.
And how easily he climbed, and how high,
Certainly, climbing, he wanted
To kiss the last of my world.

I have been here for seven weeks,
'Ghettoized'.
Who loved me have found me,
And the branches also of the white chestnut in the yard.
But I haven't seen a butterfly here.
The last one was the last one.
There are no butterflies, here, in the ghetto.

by Pavel Friedmann (Theresienstadt, 4 June 1942)

Pavel Friedmann, 'The Butterfly' in Ed. Hilda Schiff, *Holocaust Poetry* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 25.

I was not there by Karen Gershon, rescued as a child on the Kindertransport

The morning they set out from home
I was not there to comfort them
the dawn was innocent with snow
in mockery – it is not true
the dawn was neutral was immune
their shadows threaded it too soon
they were relieved that it had come
I was not there to comfort them

One told me that my father spent
a day in prison long ago
he did not tell me that he went
what difference does it make now
when he set out when he came home
I was not there to comfort him
and now I have no means to know
of what I was kept ignorant

Both my parents died in camps
I was not there to comfort them
I was not there they were alone
my mind refuses to conceive
the life the death they must have known
I must atone because I live
I could not have saved them from death
the ground is neutral underneath

Every child must leave its home
time gathers life impartially
I could have spared them nothing since
I was too young – it is not true
they might have lived to succour me
and none shall say in my defence
had I been there to comfort them
it would have made no difference

Testimonies you can read aloud

Renee Bornstein survived the Holocaust by hiding in barns, farms and convents. Marianne Cohn, a resistance worker, was murdered by the Gestapo for trying to help Renee and other children escape.



In August 1944, about two weeks after our arrival [at the prison where they interrogated us and murdered Marianne], the Lord Mayor of Annemasse negotiated our freedom. Members of the underground movement 'Le Maki' took us to a Red Cross refugee centre at the Carlton Hotel in Geneva and after three months we were returned home to our parents. We had been apart for six months. My parents survived by going into hiding.

I lost my childhood. I never learnt how to be truly carefree.

I married a concentration camp survivor, Ernst Bornstein. We lived in Munich and had three children. When he died in 1978 we moved to Manchester. With the warmth of the Manchester Jewish community, we were able to heal and I was proud to bring my children up with Jewish identities. Manchester is my home now.

Through my children and grandchildren, I found joy in life again. I am a child of the Shoah. My family is my victory.

Read more about Renee's story: www.hmd.org.uk/resource/renee-bornstein

Alec Ward survived ghettos in Poland, escaped, and was recaptured, and survived slave labour in Skarzysko Kamienna, Chestochowa, Buchenwald, and Flossberg, and the death march to Mauthausen Concentration Camp before liberation.

Having escaped from the Kozenice Ghetto:

We walked back to Magnuszew and lived in the forest and fields for three months. Our former Christian neighbours gave us some food occasionally but begged us not to come back again as they were frightened that someone will betray them to the Germans. We avoided sleeping in the same barn or haystack for two nights running in case we were discovered by the farmers and given away to the Germans. This fear was with us constantly while roaming about for three months.

The town looked absolutely dead, devoid of any life. Before the war there was a small but vibrant Jewish community, with Jewish shops, Jewish merchants and artisans. A synagogue which acted as a house of prayer and a place where to meet, Jewish children playing in the streets and a very good relationship with the non-Jewish population.

On arrival in the UK following liberation:

In 1945 Britain offered sanctuary to 1000 young survivors of Hitler's Holocaust, but such had been the scale of the slaughter no more than 732 could be found.

I was one of those 732 young survivors.

Read more about Alec's story: www.hmd.org.uk/resource/alec-ward/

Reflections on the Lectionary for 27 January 2019

**A reflection based on Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19;
1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a; and Luke 4: 14-21**

Celia Gould, former CCJ Student Leader

This year, the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is “Torn from home”, exploring the meaning of home and the impact of the enforced loss of a safe place on Jews during the Holocaust and those who have suffered in subsequent genocides. For us as Christians, this theme poses the challenge of how to respond to a world where people are torn from their homes because of genocide. The readings set for today, the Fourth Sunday of Epiphany, give a glimpse of the sort of inclusive world to which we are called to aspire, a place where all have a home, a place of safety, belonging and love.

As children of God, our ultimate home lies within the presence of God. Psalm 19 tells us how God protects and provides the sun with a home, regardless of its position in the sky (v. 5-6), so it is with us, his children. Wherever we are in the world, whether geographically at home or not, we will never be separated from the presence of God and his love. With God as embodiment of home, the responsive obligation for Christians is to contribute to building a home for everyone.

The reading from 1 Corinthians 12 uses allegory to depict the Body of Christ as a diverse communion of people, with different gifts and ways of serving God, all equally loved by their creator. Indeed, God’s very purpose for creation was that there would be diversity amongst people (v. 18): if all people had the same gifts and attributes, were the same part of the body to use Paul’s analogy, ‘where would the body be?’ (v. 19). Diversity is an integral part of the Body of Christ: each person is unique and no person is dispensable (v. 22). God calls us thus not to uniformity, but community. Paul’s letter makes us as his reader confront how we can fall short of the welcome and inclusivity of God, rejecting people and claiming that “I have no need of you”. Indeed, when we fail to see what one member has to contribute to their community, that place is no longer safe nor a home. We are thus called by God to work

towards a community that is a home for all, that does not reject people for their diversity, and reflects the love of God through its radical inclusivity.

Traditionally, the Gospel passage of Jesus reading in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4) has been used by churches to speak of Jesus' rejection by the Jewish community. Such an idea has contributed to 2000 years of persecution, setting the path towards the antisemitism that led to the Holocaust. It is important to remember this history and reflect on the fact that the radical inclusivity preached by Jesus comes from that found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In treating Jesus' words as a quotation from Isaiah (61:1-2) and situating this reading alongside that from Nehemiah, we can see that Jesus' teaching to welcome the stranger, free the oppressed, and feed the hungry is a continuation, not a rejection, of the egalitarianism and radical inclusion preached in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the reading from Nehemiah, the prophet directs those at the synagogue to 'eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared'. Within both Christianity and Judaism, the notion of sharing food carries connotations of community, and just as we are taught to save food for the poor, so we must also welcome and care for the outsider and the victim of persecution.

As Christians, we believe all are made in the image of God, and thus according to Paul, if one suffers, it is as if God is suffering himself (v. 26). God shares in our suffering and indeed, that of the world, as he did through Christ's suffering on the cross. Therefore, this Holocaust Memorial Day, let us delve deeply into our history, critically analyse what is wrong with how people treat each other today, and commit ourselves to create a new way of doing things, a community which more closely reflects God's unconditional love for us.

A reflection based on Luke 4: 16-21

The Revd Bruce Thompson, Chair of the Lincolnshire Methodist District

So far so good. If only the account could have ended at verse 21 as the Lectionary dictates. The congregation was impressed. They spoke well of him. But then it all goes pear-shaped.

Jesus appears to bring the hostile reaction upon himself.

Comparing himself with two great prophets, and pointing out that they had not been recognised by their own communities so chose instead to go to those outside of them, threw the Nazareth assembly into a rage.

The historicity of the reaction could be brought into doubt the moment we read about the crowd seeking to throw Jesus off a cliff. My goodness, they must have walked Jesus a long way to find a cliff because there are only rolling hills around Nazareth; they couldn't have done much damage to him had they have given him a sharp nudge down a slope.

The early Church, seeking to understand the meaning of the whole Jesus-event, would delve into the known scriptures looking for clues. Part of that Church, growing increasingly distant from its Jewish roots, and seeking to please the secular authorities would drive a wedge between the two monotheistic faith communities. So, they would write about hostility and rejection. They would lay the blame upon the innocent and generations would suffer as a consequence. What comes to us down the centuries is a misunderstood and much-maligned Messiah.

But what would Jesus, the Jewish rabbi, have made of that passage that day? What if he had simply commented that the scripture was indeed being fulfilled in their hearing? In my view, and because the writers of the Gospel accounts were prone to the effects of the schism, he may well have ended at what came to be recorded as verse 21.

The book of Isaiah, and it is well worth reading the whole of the 61st chapter from which Jesus reads, has the prophet speaking these words to Zion. It is Zion that will bring all these things about - it is not only the Messiah who can bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners; it is incumbent upon

all who claim to be God's people to do so. It could be a collective response to the injustices and tragedies of our world.

Isaiah 61 is sacred scripture for both Jew and Christian alike. The passage speaks of exile and return. It reassures us that ruined cities will be rebuilt, that strangers will help one another, that joy will come.

For two millennia the relationship between our faith communities have forced many into exile, we have been far from the heart of the One who would have us be siblings in faith. Isaiah 61 offers us hope. We can together rise against the oppressive power of populism. We can together companion those whose hearts are breaking. We can together work for the freedom of those caught up in the violence of the slave trade. We can together show the world a better way to the one it currently appears bent on pursuing.

The Spirit of the Lord God is indeed upon us.

Questions to consider and further resources

Questions to consider

1. What makes a place a home?
2. How does genocide tear people from their homes? What is the importance of reflecting on this theme in trying to remember the experiences of survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides?
3. How can we help provide a home to those who have been torn from their home today?



Holocaust survivor Lily Ebert with her granddaughter. Read more: hmd.org.uk/resource/liy-ebert-hidden-histories

Further resources

The Council of Christians and Jews: www.ccj.org.uk

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: www.hmd.org.uk/resources/

Yad Vashem: www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/video-testimonies.html

Contributors

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