

# Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

*Be the light in the darkness*



**HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY 27/1**

'We will continue to do our bit for as long as we can, secure in the knowledge that others will continue to light a candle long after us'.

Gena Turgel, survivor of the Holocaust (1923-2018)

***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.

The theme for HMD 2021 is 'Be the light in the darkness'. It encourages us to reflect on the depths humanity can sink to, but also the ways individuals and communities lit the darkness before, during, and after genocide.

## Outline of the resource

- What is Holocaust Memorial Day?
- Foreword and notes for using this resource in 2021
- Outline of an act of worship, including stone painting
- A survivor's testimony
- Reflections on the readings
- Further resources



The Memorial to the  
Deportees, Yad Vashem

# Foreword

The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is 'Be the light in the darkness'. This speaks to the heart of our faith as Christians. Jesus, the light of the world, invites us to come to him and live in the light. Having been brought into his light we are called to bring that light to others.

Light reveals the truth and on HMD that light will reveal and remember the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust; a darkness of what took place in those years and a darkness when humans fail to live in the light of God's love. The Holocaust was fuelled by an antisemitism which had been spread by European churches. Indeed, for the last two thousand years European Christians have been a significant element in the development of anti-Jewish ideas and at times have participated in anti-Jewish violence. The light reveals uncomfortable truths. How as Christians can we respond to this failure to live in the light of Christ? How is it possible for us to be the light in the darkness?

Since the Holocaust many Christians have rejected antisemitic teaching and sought new understanding of the relationship with Judaism. There is an acceptance of the need for repentance. For example, the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England in 2019 published *God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations* which states, 'Repentance, in this as in any other context needs to identify and name what is sinful, letting it be seen for what it is in the light of God's righteousness'. The call to be the light in the darkness creates a genuine opportunity to reflect on and express our repentance for Christian involvement in spreading antisemitism. I hope for a multitude of lights in churches across the country on 27 January shining God's light into this darkness.

Be the light in the darkness and take time to remember the millions of people, of all faiths and none, murdered during the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

During this Covid-19-shaped year the ease with which different faiths have

come together and responded to need has been uplifting. All over the country local initiatives have sprung up inspired by faith; churches working alongside others, reflecting God's love for each person. Building connected communities is one way of resisting the darkness that can take hold when we fail to honour every individual as made in God's image. Let's be a light in the darkness by continuing to build up connected communities as well as by using this resource to mark HMD in churches across the country.

Siriol Davies

National Presence & Engagement Programme Coordinator, Mission & Public Affairs, Church of England

## **Marking Holocaust Memorial Day 2021**

Every Holocaust Memorial Day is unique, but our commemoration in 2021 is especially so.

First, HMD 2021 is the first commemoration since the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2020. That anniversary was marked by international observances in Israel and Poland, and a CCJ event at the House of Lords in Westminster. It was the last major anniversary at which survivors of the Holocaust will likely be present; we stand on the threshold of a new era of Holocaust education and commemoration in which we won't have the living witness of survivors. Second, the Covid-19 pandemic has magnified inequalities and social tensions, and enabled a worrying spike in racism and antisemitism in many countries.

Partly in response to these two features of HMD 2021, this resource encourages you to incorporate a creative activity into your commemorations: stone painting to remember individual victims of the Holocaust or other genocides. The Foundation Stones project is a government-backed initiative to gather painted stones from across the country to incorporate into the foundations of the future UK Holocaust memorial and learning centre – literally forming the foundation for a new era of Holocaust education. We encourage you to consider painting stones in your local community group, church, interfaith gathering, or CCJ branch.

This resource also assumes commemorations will take place on Zoom or other platforms. Please consider current government guidance when planning your HMD observance.

The way we commemorate the Shoah in particular is changing, but one aspect remains the same: the imperative to remember, to stand together, and to 'be a light in the darkness', wherever we live. Your role is crucial in this, even if it is just placing a single lit candle in your window. Thank you for taking part.

Nathan Eddy  
Interim Director, CCJ

For more information on the Foundation Stones project, visit  
<https://www.big-ideas.org/current-projects/foundation-stones>



*The Chief Rabbi speaks at Lambeth Palace in December 2018 to mark the 80th anniversary of the start of the Kindertransport*

# Preparing a commemoration of HMD 2021

The following prayers and readings reflect the theme 'Be the light in the darkness' and are designed to work on Zoom platforms.

If incorporating the Foundation Stones project into your commemorations, participants may wish to begin the event with the painting of stones, or to do this at some point in the order of service below, perhaps after the readings.

Before the event, participants should be invited to gather the following items:

- a flat stone or pottery or masonry shard for painting or colouring
- paint pens and markers or paints and brushes
- a candle for lighting

Additionally, participants may wish to reflect beforehand on the words or image they will paint on their stones. There are many stories of survivors, for example, which can be found at the HMDT web site by searching for 'life stories' or visiting

[https://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/?genocide=any&resource\\_type=9&age=any](https://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/?genocide=any&resource_type=9&age=any)

Finally, consider in advance how you can collect the stones from participants in a safe manner and send them to the Foundation Stones project. For example, participants could agree to individually place their painted stones in a public area for display – outside a church, for example – and the organiser could collect them at a later date. Post your stones to Big Ideas, Unit 1, 465C Hornsey Road, London, N19 4DR, or email [foundationstones@bigideas.org](mailto:foundationstones@bigideas.org) for further details. Please also share pictures of your stones on social media using the hashtag #FoundationStones.

# Prayers for Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

*Participants are invited to light their candles*

## **Opening words**

God of light and life,  
we gather  
**to remember**

We gather  
**to stand against hate**

We gather  
**to say, never again**

We gather  
**to work for the flourishing of all**

God of light and life,  
**shine among us**  
**as we gather.**

*A short time of silence is observed*

## **A prayer of confession**

Voice 1: Friends, we are called to walk in the light. (John 8:12 and 12:35)

Voice 2: Forgive the times we have followed ways of our own choosing.

Voice 3: Set us in paths of righteousness, for your name's sake. (Ps 23:3)

*Silence*

Voice 1: Friends, we are called to consider whether the light in us is not darkness. (Luke 11:35)

Voice 2: Forgive the times we have failed to share your light.

Voice 3: Give us courage to share your light, together.

*Silence*

Voice 1: Friends, the prophets denounced those who 'who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness'. (Is 5:20)

Voice 2: Forgive our cynicism that costs others so dearly.

Voice 3: Sustain us as we seek the light of your life in the world.

*Silence*

Voice 1: Friends, God brings even deep darkness to light. (Job 12:22)

Voice 2: Let your light shine on us, O God, that we might live. (Is 9:2)

Voice 3: Open our eyes and renew us, for in your light we see light (Ps 36:9)  
Amen.

## **A prayer for use with young people**

God of love, on this day we pray for the victims of the Holocaust and of genocides in other parts of the world. We pray that you send your light on all who lost loved ones. We pray that you help us hear the words of survivors. We pray that the names of all victims will never be forgotten, but will be remembered by us and by those who come after us. We pray that our world will resist evil and intolerance, so that we can all live together in peace and prosperity. And we pray that you will help us be the light in the darkness.  
Amen.



## Readings from scripture

Ps 43

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust  
deliver me!

<sup>2</sup> For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you cast me off?

Why must I walk about mournfully  
because of the oppression of the enemy?

<sup>3</sup> O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;

let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.

<sup>4</sup> Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God my exceeding joy;  
and I will praise you with the harp,  
O God, my God.

<sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

*A short time of silence is observed*

James 1:17 and 22-27

<sup>17</sup> Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above,  
coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or  
shadow due to change.

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who  
look at themselves in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for they look at themselves and, on going

away, immediately forget what they were like. <sup>25</sup> But those who look into the  
perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget  
but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

<sup>26</sup> If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive  
their hearts, their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled

before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

*A short time of silence is observed*

Matt 5:15-16

<sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

## **Poetry**

Testimony, by Dan Pagis (1930-1986)

No, no: they definitely were  
human beings: uniforms, boots.  
How to explain? They were created  
in the image.

I was a shade.  
A different creator made me.

And he in his mercy left nothing of me that would die.  
And I fled to him, rose weightless, blue,  
forgiving – I would even say: apologizing –  
smoke to omnipotent smoke  
without image or likeness.

(<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/dan-pagis.html>)

## **Sharing of stones**

*If incorporating foundation stone painting into your event, here is an opportunity for participants to paint their stones or to share their stones and the stories behind them. Alternatively, a short reflection could be given on the readings, or a time of silence observed.*

## **Called to be a light: A litany**

When faced with religious discrimination,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with a global pandemic that threatens our wellbeing,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with the darkness of shame and rejection,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with human beings not being treated in a dignified manner,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with discrimination for 'being different',  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with injustices caused in the name of religion,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with people who are unable to live in their own countries and homelands,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with a lack of generosity towards refugees and migrants,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with genocide,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

When faced with denial of the Holocaust,  
**Jesus calls us to be a light shining in the darkness.**

**We look to the light of Jesus, so that as we reflect his light in the world, it is filled with the harvest of his good works.**

**Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

*Participants are invited to pray the Lord's Prayer together in whatever version is most suitable.*

*A short time of silence is observed*

## **Closing words**

As we go from this place of prayer into a world of challenge and change,  
**We remember the pain of the past.**

As we follow God's command to let to our light shine,  
**We recognise the opportunity of the here and now.**

As we seek the truth and glimpse God's light in all people and places,  
**We commit ourselves to sharing God's light through hope and love.**

## **A shared benediction**

**May the light of God shine on us,  
transform our lives,  
and brighten the world.  
Amen.**



*Janusz Korczak Memorial, Yad Vashem*

# A survivor's testimony

Blanche Benedick

*In this educational resource for secondary age students, Blanche Benedick tells her story of escape from the Nazis. Blanche's family were Jewish and lived in Nazi-occupied Denmark. They were helped to escape to Sweden by Danish and Swedish people who risked their lives to help them make the crossing by boat.*



My name is Blanche Benedick and I was born in Copenhagen in Denmark, on 20 September 1933. My father had a small factory. He was a wonderful man who could turn his hand to anything to look after the family. My mother always seemed to be in the kitchen. I remember coming home from school and being greeted by delicious cooking smells. I had an older brother and sister from my father's first marriage. My younger sister was born later, in Sweden.

We lived in a second-floor flat in a mainly Jewish area in Copenhagen. It was a traditional Jewish home and we lit our candles every Friday night. We didn't go to synagogue every Saturday, but we always went at festival times. Before the war, we also kept the special dietary rules at home. I have very clear memories of the festival of Passover. Grandfather would go through all the prayers and songs from beginning to end – which takes hours! I was only about 10 and we weren't allowed to eat until he had finished – about 11pm! I used to sit and look at the painting on the wall – a table with a big bunch of grapes – and I used to count the grapes. I still have that painting at home today and I treasure it.

As a child, I liked sports and singing, but I also loved playing outdoors. I had my dolls and pram and used to take them for walks on Sundays with Mona, my friend from across the road.

Mona was my best friend, but she wasn't Jewish. We went to school on the same tram, although to different schools. I started at a Jewish school

when I was about seven and can remember my first day. We had to wear little aprons and the first class was like nursery school; you learnt a few things and got used to playing with other children. I stayed at that school until I was ten.

When war broke out and the Germans invaded Denmark in 1940, we suffered the same curfews and rationing as other countries, and there was bombing. We had to run down to the cellar whenever there were air raids. There was a lot of talk about the Jewish people – that things were going to get worse for them.

One day at school, the headmaster called me into his office and said, 'You know there's a war on?' And I replied, 'Of course I do.' By then I was ten and knew what was happening. He went on, 'Well, Mona's mother came to see me today and said you have to go back to their house this afternoon. Your mother and father are there as well.' So I went back to Mona's after school.

My mother was sitting crying and my father was pacing up and down, looking worried. Mona's mother said, 'Don't worry, Blanche, you're going to stay here with us for a few days. We're going to hide you because we've heard that all the Jews are going to be rounded up.' That was in October 1943.

Like many ordinary Danish people, Mona's parents were wonderful and did so much to help us – even though they were risking their own lives. There were about 8,000 Jewish people in Copenhagen at the time – and only 450 were caught. Mona's father was a keen photographer and had a dark room to develop his pictures. He told me, 'If you hear the Nazi police coming up the stairs, run into that little room and keep very quiet.' The police actually came twice and it was very scary.

We stayed there for about four days, but it wasn't safe for Mona's parents to keep us very long. They arranged a taxi to take us to the coast – because our aim was to go by boat across to Sweden, which wasn't involved in the war. I remember that in the taxi, my father gave me some money and said, 'Keep that safe in your pocket. We're going to hide you under the rug, so if we get stopped, they might not see you. If we're separated, you've got your whole life ahead of you and might have a chance of being saved.' Fortunately, we were not stopped.

At the coast, we went to a big hut where the fishermen kept the catch of the day. There were some other Jewish people waiting there, but because my mother was pregnant, the fishermen took us in the first boat. There were about 20 of us, including some small children. The little ones were given a sleeping tablet so they wouldn't cry or make a noise. We got into the fishing boat at dawn the next day. The fisherman hid us under a big tarpaulin and we set off.

The journey across to Sweden usually took about two and a half hours, but that day it took ten because the fisherman had to keep stopping and throwing his nets out, pretending to be fishing. It was very cramped and uncomfortable and we could see lights shining from German boats. It was all very frightening. Fortunately, we arrived in Sweden safely.

Once we arrived, we were taken to a church hall that had been turned into dormitories. In another room that was like a canteen, we were given a bread roll and some tomato soup. I remember we were only allowed one roll and one bowl of soup because more boatloads of people were arriving through the day and night.

I didn't go to school for that first year in Sweden, but I learnt Swedish very quickly. After my baby sister was born in January 1944, I went to a nice Swedish school, where I was treated exceptionally well. We were the only refugee family living in the little town and the local people did a lot to help us. I remember there was a school skiing trip, but we didn't have much money at home so I didn't say anything about it. One day when I got to school, there was a weekend case on my desk. I put my hand up and said, 'Excuse me, miss, there's a case on my desk.' And the teacher said, 'Yes, it's for you.' I opened it and inside there were sweaters, socks and mittens – everything you needed for a winter break. I burst into tears and my teacher said, 'Did you really think we'd go without you?' Then she gave me a little brown envelope and said, 'This is from the teachers. It's your spending money – just the same as the other children.'

We stayed in Sweden until 1945, the end of the war, then went back to Copenhagen. We were so happy to discover that all our family had survived. We went to see if our flat was still there. Our lovely neighbour – again non-Jewish – had even rented it out while we were away and kept the money for us.

Back in Copenhagen, I finished my schooling and met up with my old friends again. I desperately wanted to train to be a dress designer and work for the biggest fashion house in Copenhagen. I got an apprenticeship there and qualified as a cutter and designer when I was 18. Then I came to England in 1952, where I met and married my late husband, but that's another story...

I like to tell my story to schoolchildren because I think they can learn from my experiences. We live in a multi-racial society in England. We are lucky to live in a free country and should mix with everybody and try to understand other people's culture. Think what the wonderful Danish and Swedish people did for me and my family...

### **For discussion:**

Name the people in Blanche's testimony who were 'a light in the darkness' for her and her family.

You can read more about Blanche here:

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/blanche-benedick/>

Thanks to the National Holocaust Centre for contributing Blanche's story to the resources collected by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.



# Notes on the scripture readings and poem

The three readings from scripture touch on the theme of 'Be the light in the darkness' in different ways and are taken from the New Revised Standard Version. Although these are not lectionary readings for the Epiphany season, they do fit a general Epiphany theme of light.

Ancient Israel associated God with light in its most ancient temple rituals and beliefs ('In your light we see light', reads Ps 36:9). Sharing in this cultic tradition, Ps 43 makes clear in its central petition that light is the creation and gift of God: 'Send out your light and truth' (v 3). A lament, Ps 43 is closely related to Ps 42 but also stands on its own as an expression of suffering side-by-side with resolute hope. The desire for freedom of worship expressed in vv 3-4 brings to mind the celebration of Chanukkah, the Jewish festival of light, in camps across Europe during the Holocaust despite limited means and appalling conditions. It also brings to mind other genocides in history. When the Khmer Rouge took power in Cambodia, for example, religion was abolished and families were broken apart. The words of lament in Ps 43 are still raw, yet from unknown depths it finds hope in its conclusion.

The mention of the 'Father of lights' in the Epistle reading (James 2:17) seems to refer to God's creating of the lights and bodies of heaven, as in Ps 136:7-9 and Gen 1. James unequivocally connects this cosmic 'Father of lights' with the imperative that people of faith respond with righteous deeds and not just good intentions when confronted with suffering, especially the suffering of vulnerable orphans and widows (compare with Exodus 22:22-24). Children and unprotected women are often the first casualties of conflict. During the war, 10,000 Jewish children were rescued and brought to Britain in the Kindertransport; but hundreds of thousands more children perished (one estimate puts the figure at 1.5 million). Reading James in this context reminds us of the importance of our collective and individual actions, and of the cost of failing to act.

Jesus' words in Matthew 5, from the Sermon on the Mount, are of a piece with Matthew's stress on the importance of action (not just faith) elsewhere in his gospel, as in Matt 25:32-46, for example. Jesus' words also stand in a long line of similar instructions in the Bible; Ps 112:4, for example, praises

those who fear the Lord because 'They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright'. These words challenge us to act, and the divine associations with light in the ancient world challenge us to see God's actions in these human actions of sharing light.

The Israeli poet Dan Pagis was born in a German-speaking Jewish family in Bukovina, Romania (present-day Ukraine), and was interned in a concentration camp as teenager before escaping in 1944 and emigrating to Israel. He wrote in Hebrew, a language he learned only as a teenager, and his first poems about the Holocaust appeared 25 years after the events. He also taught medieval Jewish literature at the Hebrew University.

The poem 'Testimony' draws attention to the experience of the victims of the Shoah, not the perpetrators. The perpetrators are just 'uniforms and boots'; instead we are drawn the survivor's voice. Like so many survivors of the Holocaust and other traumas, the poet's life is changed. He is more like smoke than a human being – a shade or shadow, in the central stanza, rather than an 'image'; in the Hebrew original, there's wordplay between these two words, as they differ only by one crucial letter ('tzelem' and 'tzel' are the words for 'image', and 'shade', respectively).

Being a 'shade' or a shadow is a poignant and troubling description of life after trauma, and fits with our 2021 theme. Life does not simply return to 'normal' after events like those Pagis experienced. Moreover, the poet, who did nothing wrong, even feels the need to apologise to God in the last stanza – an example of the survivor's guilt that has been well-documented amongst survivors of the Shoah and trauma in general. The poet's shadow-like existence is a challenge to the closure we seek in art and literature, and even in a HMD service; although the poet has lived to tell the tale, there is no happy ending here, no easy comfort. A simple contrast between light and dark is not appropriate here; the shadows persist even in the light of liberation.

The poem also voices anger at humanity: 'No, no, they were definitely human beings', reads the first line. The perpetrators were not monsters or animals. They were created in the image, they were humans like us. The humanity of the perpetrators is a reminder of genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur. The only hope is that human beings 'be the light in the darkness', not the perpetrators of violence.

This poem directs our attention to the victims, in empathy, and to our shared human nature, in resolve. It's perhaps this journey as readers from smoky formlessness to anger and resolve that is this poem's hope. Even so, the shadow-like existence of the survivor is a haunting and significant image for our 2021 theme.

### **Further resources:**

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/what-is-holocaust-memorial-day/this-years-theme/>

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/take-part-in-holocaust-memorial-day/hmd-together/>

Whatever you are planning, please let us know at [cjrelations@ccj.org.uk](mailto:cjrelations@ccj.org.uk) and/or share your event with HMDT directly on their interactive map:

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/take-part-in-holocaust-memorial-day/activities-form/>

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The Council of Christians and Jews  
Mary Sumner House  
24 Tufton Street  
London, SW1P 3RB  
[www.ccj.org.uk](http://www.ccj.org.uk)  
020 3515 3003 | [cjrelations@ccj.org.uk](mailto:cjrelations@ccj.org.uk)  
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