CCJ Impact Report

An evaluation of the 'Testimony of the Holocaust' programme 2022-2023

> "I stood outside the crematorium at Auschwitz... and said, this has to change me and how I work."

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

by the University of Winchester

Contents

3 Introduction

4 About the 'Testimony of the Holocaust Programme'

5 General Impressions

6 Reflections on CCJ's Leadership

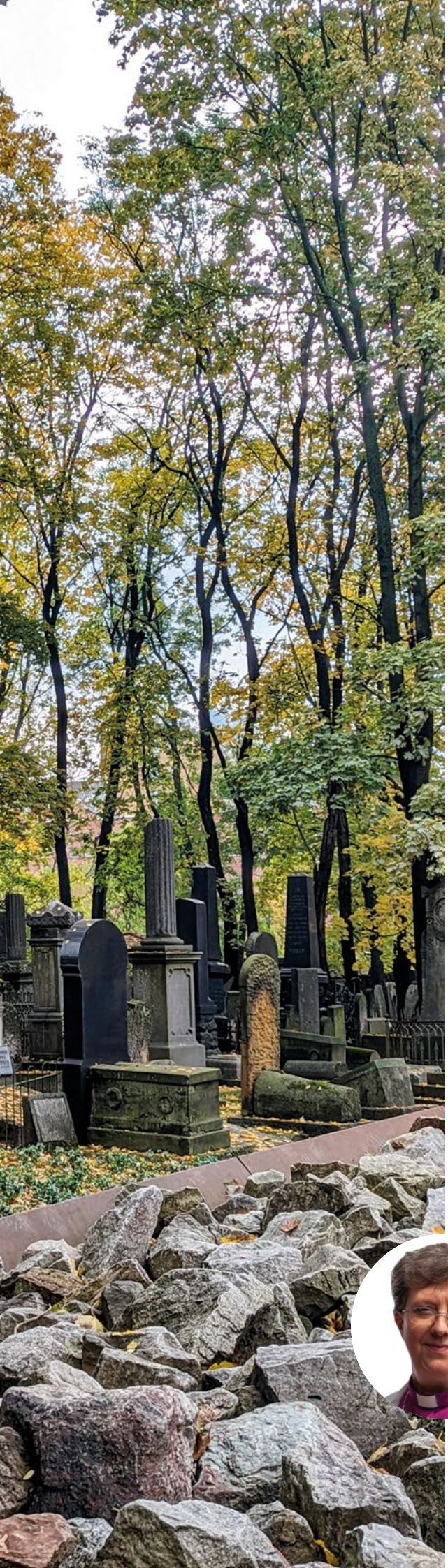
7 Group Dynamics

8 Learning Impact

9 Learning about Christian-Jewish Relations

10 Empowerment

11 Acknowledgements



Introduction

As Chair of the Council of Christians and Jews, I am delighted to introduce this report on our 'Testimony of the Holocaust Programme'.

The Council of Christians and Jews commissioned the Institute of Education at the University of Winchester to conduct an evaluation of the Testimony of the Holocaust programmes, which ran in 2022 and 2023. This short paper highlights some snapshots of the positive, qualitative impact of the programme on the participants, drawn from this extensive report.

The Testimony of the Holocaust programme sits at the heart of CCJ's mission and values. The Council of Christians and Jews was founded in 1942, at the height of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Today we are the leading nationwide forum for Christian-Jewish engagement. For over 80 years, we have been engaging Jewish and Christian communities across the UK in education, dialogue, and social change. We aim to celebrate the history and diversity of both communities, to enable meaningful educational experiences, to facilitate constructive dialogue, and provide opportunities for transformative social change. Today, CCJ is the only organisation in the UK which provides Holocaust education tailored specifically for the Christian community.

Through this programme Church leaders are equipped to learn about the vibrant Jewish life that existed in Europe, the devastation of the Holocaust, and contemporary Jewish Christian relations. They are encouraged and supported in bringing this learning back to their communities and into their work. We aspire to commemorate the past and transform Christian-Jewish relations for the future.

If you would like to find out more about this programme, or any other aspect of our work, please be in touch with the CCJ team.

Rt Revd Sarah Bullock, Chair of the Council of Christians and Jews

About the 'Testimony of the Holocaust' Programme

'Testimony of the Holocaust' is a programme run by the Council of Christians and Jews, educating senior Christian leaders about the Holocaust and Christian-Jewish relations through an in-person trip to Poland and accompanying enrichment seminars.

Through this programme, the participants will be equipped with a deeper appreciation and understanding of Jewish life and identity, a detailed knowledge of the events of the Holocaust, and the inspiration to foster positive interfaith relations between Christians and Jews back home in the UK.

The itinerary for the programme centres around guided visits to sites connected to the Holocaust, from ghettoes to deportation stations and Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as places associated with today's Jewish community in Poland, such as Jewish community centres and places of worship.

The programme has several aims.

1) Firstly, this programme seeks to educate participants about Jewish life in Poland before, during, and after the Second World War. This centres around visits to Holocaust sites in Warsaw, Lodz, Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as sites which demonstrate the diversity of Jewish life before the Second World War, and Jewish life in Poland today.

2) The second aim is to learn about Christian-Jewish relations in Poland. It explores the history of Christian-Jewish relations in the country and discusses how this is relevant for understanding the Holocaust. Through meeting with senior Christian and Jewish leaders, contemporary challenges in Christian-Jewish relations are discussed, as well as positive examples of interfaith engagement which seek to overcome centuries of Christian persecution of Jews.

3) The final aim is to explore contemporary issues in Poland by uncovering how the memory of the Holocaust intersects with other contemporary issues, particularly around identity-based discrimination and the curation of memory.

General Impressions

Participants from both cohorts of this programme shared positive impressions about the experience, variously referring to it as “a terrific experience”, “a privilege”, and “life-changing and transformative”.

> It certainly has stayed with me. My overwhelming thought was how to take what I saw and who we met and turn that into something that’s palpable for the wider church.

A number of participants commented that they had “immense gratitude” for taking part, and that it had been “really valuable”.

When asked if they would recommend the programme to others, all participants who responded did so positively. Participants commented:

“Without a doubt… I would have no hesitation in doing so.”

“I raved about the programme.”

Reflections on CCJ's Leadership

Prior to joining the programme, participants were motivated to take part for several reasons including: pre-existing relationships with CCJ, a desire for interfaith engagement, and a recognition of CCJ's esteemed reputation. Participants 'trusted CCJ to provide an intentional and meaningful experience rather than a tourist-like programme.'

Participants praised the leadership of the programme from CCJ. The leaders' inclusive and supportive approach was particularly noted. They were described as reliable, impressive, and adept at fostering a comfortable and confident environment. The leadership's ability to maintain group cohesion, provide practical and emotional support, and challenge participants appropriately was appreciated. Overall, participants felt well-supported, and valued the thoughtful and spiritually grounded leadership provided by the CCJ.

> "This is CCJ... they're tried and tested and really reliable, and really good at what they do."

Group Dynamics

Participants from both cohorts spoke very positively about the groups they shared their programme with, describing them as “brilliant company”, “an amazing group”, and having “absolutely wonderful” dynamics.

Participants felt the group size was ideal and appreciated the lack of cliques, which fostered better engagement. Many built lasting relationships and have collaborated professionally following the programme.

Participants valued the shared experience and network for support that was created.

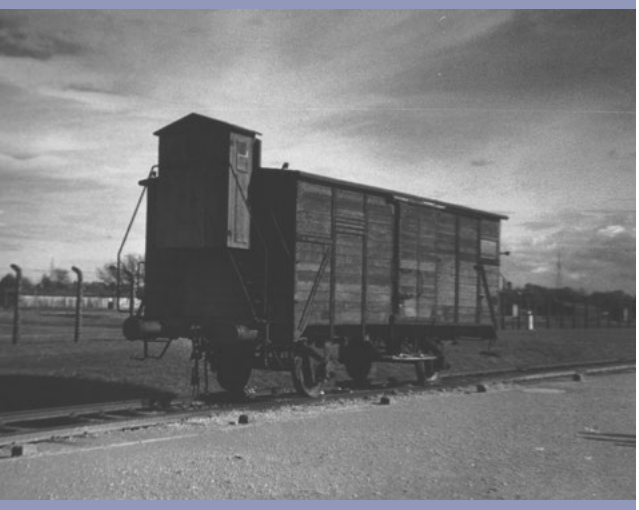
The programme provides an opportunity for senior Christian leaders to build a network with one another.

One participant reported that members of their cohort regularly meet in different contexts and “stories about this experience always come up”.

They continued to reflect on the importance of the network which the experience had created, “having that network has been a real support” – illustrating how various members of the cohorts had been maintaining contacts to continue to develop their skills and their work across different professional audiences.

Learning Impact

> I've been left with abiding images that I don't ever want to lose, even the thought of them starts making me cry.



Participants' overall impressions of their time in Poland during the programme were overwhelmingly positive, with many referring to specific places, sites, and speakers that stood out to them. The visits to various locations, such as the cemetery in Warsaw, the Ringelblum Archive, the POLIN Museum, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, were particularly impactful. Several participants found the cemetery in Warsaw a poignant introduction to the history of Polish Jewry, highlighting its gentle and humane approach. The Ringelblum Archive was noted for its emotional challenge, with participants deeply moved by the personal messages and historical artefacts. The POLIN Museum was praised for its comprehensive and engaging portrayal of Jewish-Polish history, with some participants describing it as "life changing".

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum left a significant impression on the participants, evoking strong emotional responses through its displays of personal belongings and the sheer scale of the atrocities committed. Visits to other cities like Kraków and Łodz, as well as sites like the Taube Centre and the restored Temple Synagogue, also contributed to the participants' reflections on the historical and contemporary aspects of Jewish life in Poland. The recollections from participants illustrated how visits to Holocaust-related sites are a very personal experience for visitors.

The visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum clearly had a visceral impact on one participant, who said "I've done Holocaust studies before. So, I've read a lot… but I've never actually stood [there] and given myself the time and the space to contemplate it as a place, and as three-dimensional". They continued to say, "there's a before you've seen Auschwitz, and an after you've seen Auschwitz moment".

"I've been left with abiding images that I don't ever want to lose, even the thought of them starts making me cry".

Another participant highlighted the impact of framing visits to Holocaust sites within a wider narrative of Jewish life: "That was the real value of the trip. It's not that the site visits weren't good, they were fine, there's something really emotional about going to those places, but I think meeting the people, and I thought the way in which the programme was organised, looking at the vibrancy of Jewish life, pre-Holocaust, and looking at the recovery of Jewish life post-Holocaust gave a really good framing. I think it made for a better conversation and something more, something much richer than if we had primarily just done the ghettos and Auschwitz".

Learning about Christian-Jewish Relations

> I think spending time with the Jewish community in Poland, for me, was probably the highlight, because that goes beyond what you can learn or what you can hear second-hand.

From their responses, participants clearly gained considerable further knowledge and understanding about Jewish-Christian relations through their participation in the programme. One participant, for example, said that "I think spending time with the Jewish community in Poland, for me, was probably the highlight, because that goes beyond what you can learn or what you can hear second-hand".

Another participant similarly saw their learning as a call-to-action: "I stood outside the crematorium at Auschwitz… and said this has to change me and how I work, the question for me was, what does that look like, what does it mean to be an ally and an advocate for Christian-Jewish understanding?"

The programme fostered a greater empathy and understanding towards the Jewish community among its participants. Some noted increased sympathy for the Jewish experience in Europe and applied this understanding in their congregational work.

One participant, for example, felt that their "visit to Poland has informed my subsequent work [with my congregation] and in supporting my team" as well as helping them to become "more sympathetic to the experience of Jews, who do not feel safe in Europe, or have not felt safe in Europe, in a way that I have a little more understanding".

> What does it mean to be an ally and an advocate for Christian-Jewish understanding? ...it gave me a compulsion to say, 'you can't stand back. You can't not be involved'. That's helped hugely, I think.

> I think that I would feel more confident [now] entering into discussions or meetings with Jewish leaders.

Empowerment

Almost all of the participants spoke at some length about the things they had felt empowered to do specifically as a result of their participation in their CCJ programme. This included doing talks, preaching about the visit, and participating in Holocaust Memorial Day activities.

Some engaged more with local Jewish communities, arranging meetings with Rabbis and participating in Jewish events, as a result of their programme. The programme also bolstered participants' interfaith efforts more widely. For example, some felt a renewed commitment to interfaith relations, integrating their experiences into teaching, preaching, and writing with more confidence and force. Some used insights from the programme to engage with the local Jewish community and address antisemitism in church training materials, for example.

"I think it's made me keener to really make an effort in terms of interfaith relations. It's not that I wasn't making an effort before and didn't care, it's just made me more, I think, keener to just carry on doing that and deepen that part of my ministry and my interactions. I think there is something about being able to say, I've been on that programme, I did this, I met these people, that just carries into my general teaching, preaching, writing, public speaking with a different force, because it's quite different when you refer to something that you read or something that you've learnt or something that you've heard, to something that's become part of a lived experience that you can refer to. I think that has more power, and, in a sense, it makes it easier, I think, to integrate naturally into other things that I do".

For this participant, it was clear that the visceral experience of visiting sites in Poland, and hearing from people online, and in-country had given them a particular strength and sense of purpose in their interfaith work.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks also to the Taube Center for Jewish Life and Learning, to Scott Saunders, and to all the participants who took part in 'Testimony of the Holocaust' and gave their time to this evaluation process.

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

AJR
The Association of Jewish Refugees

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF THYATEIRA AND GREAT BRITAIN

CCJ EXISTS:

To promote religious and cultural understanding between Christian and Jewish communities within the United Kingdom.

To advance the elimination of religious and racial prejudice, hatred and discrimination with particular reference to antisemitism.

To promote religious and racial harmony within the United Kingdom on the basis of the ethical and social teachings common to Judaism and Christianity.

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