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Ordinary People

A RESOURCE FOR CHURCHES

FOR HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 2023

Dome of the
Hall of Names
at Yad Vashem



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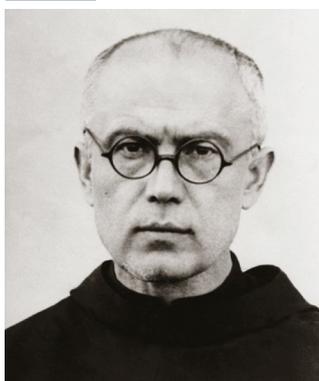


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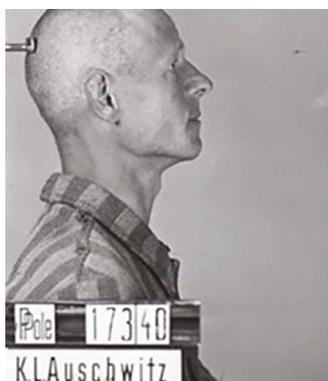
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FROM OUR PRESIDENTS

RABBI JONATHAN WITTENBERG

Every year I preserve fruit in large jars in honour of my great-aunt Sophie who wrote to her mother in the last summer before the Nazis occupied her hometown of how she was bottling all kinds of berries from her garden. She didn't manage to escape; in January 1943 she was deported first to Theresienstadt, then to Auschwitz-Birkenau where she was gassed on arrival. This is my way of remembering her.

Some memories are merely stray associations. Others become part of our core self, shaping our values and directing how we act. That is how we need to remember the Nazi Holocaust and the appalling, shameful genocides perpetrated since. Learning about the unimaginable sufferings of people like ourselves, how they were murdered and how survivors coped with their terrible wounds, physical and mental, has to make a difference to how we act in the world. It should strengthen our determination to uphold and defend the dignity of each and every person, irrespective of their faith, nationality and identity.

The subject of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is ordinary people. On the one hand, we are all ordinary people; on the other hand, there's no such thing as an ordinary person. Our life flows from the same sacred wellspring, yet it nourishes something special and distinctive in each of us. We are unique in our personality and relationships; we all have a particular contribution to make to those around us and the world. In standing up for each other, we affirm the irreplaceable potential in each and every person for goodness and creativity.

*'There is nothing too ordinary,
nothing too small to matter, when
it comes to doing what is right.'*



In a world full of cruelty and injustice, there's a constant temptation to succumb to the thought that there's not much we can do, no real difference we can make. Those who owe their lives to the courage of one neighbour, one quietly defiant individual, one family, don't think like that. They truly know how much every decision and every action counts. There is nothing too ordinary, nothing too small to matter, when it comes to doing what is right.

That is why it is so important that what we learn on this and subsequent Holocaust Memorial Days should enter our heart and guide our values and actions.

REVD FIONA SMITH



'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

These are the opening words of the sacred Scriptures for both Jew and Christian. They are foundational to our faith: they acknowledge our corporate belief that before there was anything in the whole universe there was God and that it was God who chose to create the awesome wonder and beauty of the earth and fill it with light and life in diverse abundance.

We know the Genesis story so well that in its familiarity we easily lose sight of one of the most fundamental aspects of its message that on the 6th day God created us human beings in God's image.

This God given human dignity is bestowed upon all human beings – it is intrinsic to everyone – whatever their background, their race, their creed or their colour. God ordained difference with dignity.

'As we ordinary people gather to remember the Holocaust, as we read the Scriptures and pray, may our hearts be open to the transforming light of God who calls us to live our daily lives recognising that the other is also a human being made in the image of God, for this is the only path to peace.'

Flowing from this truth emerges our common calling to love God and to love our neighbour whoever they are.

This is not a philosophical ideal to aspire to but a daily task for us to embrace as we endeavour to always recognise the imprint of God's image upon the other person we meet however different they are to us. When we do so we open up ourselves to the reality that within God's good creation there is room for us both.

We live today in a hugely polarised world – no longer do we seem willing or able to agree to disagree instead we divide into camps of 'them' and 'us'. It was such thinking that led to the Holocaust.

But the truth is there is no 'them' and 'us', there is only us.

We must never forget what we human beings are capable of which is why these resources for marking Holocaust Memorial Day are so vitally important. This year's theme is 'ordinary people'. That means us as well as the 6 million Jews who were systematically killed during the Holocaust.

As we ordinary people gather to remember the Holocaust, as we read the Scriptures and pray, may our hearts be open to the transforming light of God who calls us to live our daily lives recognising that the other is also a human being made in the image of God, for this is the only path to peace.

I leave you with a quote by the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sachs:

'Only when we realise the danger of wishing that everyone should be the same – the same faith on the one hand, the same world on the other – will we prevent the clash of civilisations, born of the sense of threat and fear. We will learn to live with diversity once we understand the God-given, world-enhancing dignity of difference.'

WHAT IS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY?

The 27th of 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.

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

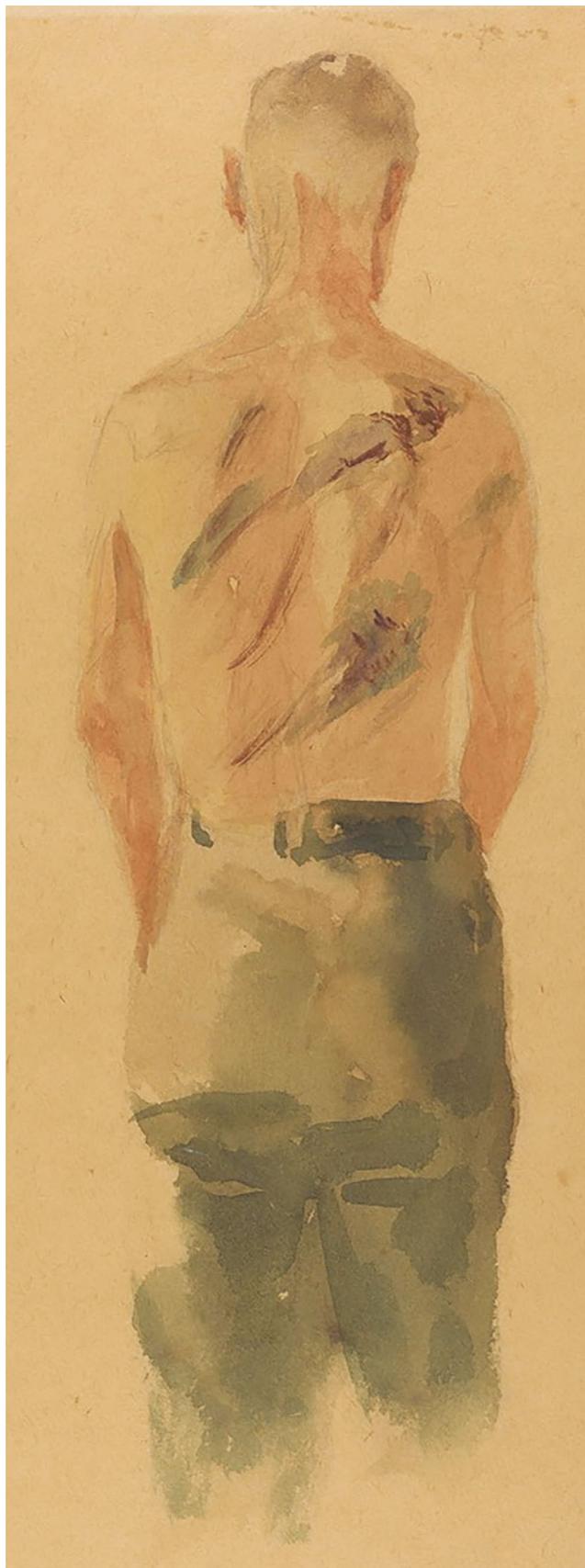
In the UK, thousands of local events and activities take place every year – each one an opportunity for people to reflect on those whose lives were changed beyond recognition, and to challenge prejudice, discrimination, and hatred in our own society today. On HMD, we all have a role to play to ensure that we learn the lessons of the past, to create a safer, better future.

Holocaust Memorial day Theme: 'Ordinary People'

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 is 'ordinary people'. Through this theme, we are invited to think about all the millions of ordinary victims of Nazi persecution and subsequent genocides. We are also prompted to think about how easy it is for 'ordinary people' to become perpetrators. In this light, today ordinary people must be alert to the dangers of antisemitism, racism, and intolerance, and strive to combat the evil of genocide in our world.

In this resource, you will find examples of 'ordinary' people who demonstrated extraordinary acts of solidarity, resistance, and perseverance through their faith. There are also prayers which we hope you will consider saying around Holocaust Memorial Day, to dedicate ourselves and our communities to never forgetting the horrors of the Holocaust, and to praying for a world where such hatred is overcome.

Beaten (My Brother Gedalyahu), Kovno Ghetto, 1941-1944.
Jacob Lipschitz (1903-1945). Watercolor on paper.
Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem.
Photo © Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem.



PRACTICAL ADVICE

FOR A COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLOCAUST IN CHURCHES

1

Include survivor testimony where possible. Consider inviting a survivor to speak or including readings from survivor testimony.

2

We may not always have the words to describe or process such horrendous suffering. Silence can be helpful and powerful.

3

Consider an activity. Lighting candles can be a powerful and simple sign of remembrance.

4

Avoid appropriating Jewish customs and tradition.

5

Do not try to 'christianise' the history of the Holocaust to the detriment of highlighting the Jewish perspective.

6

Highlight stories of the Righteous Among the Nations, but also be aware of the role of Christian antisemitism as a factor in the Holocaust.

7

Consider what you want people to learn about the Holocaust from your commemoration. Have you included the number of people who were killed, for example?

8

Each genocide is unique, so avoid shallow comparisons to present day situations.

9

Consider collaborating. HMD can be a good way of bringing people together - different faith groups, civic representatives etc.

10

Be aware of the emotional impact of Holocaust history. If you are using images, consider their appropriateness - the aim is not to traumatise the participants but to inspire solidarity and positive ideals today.

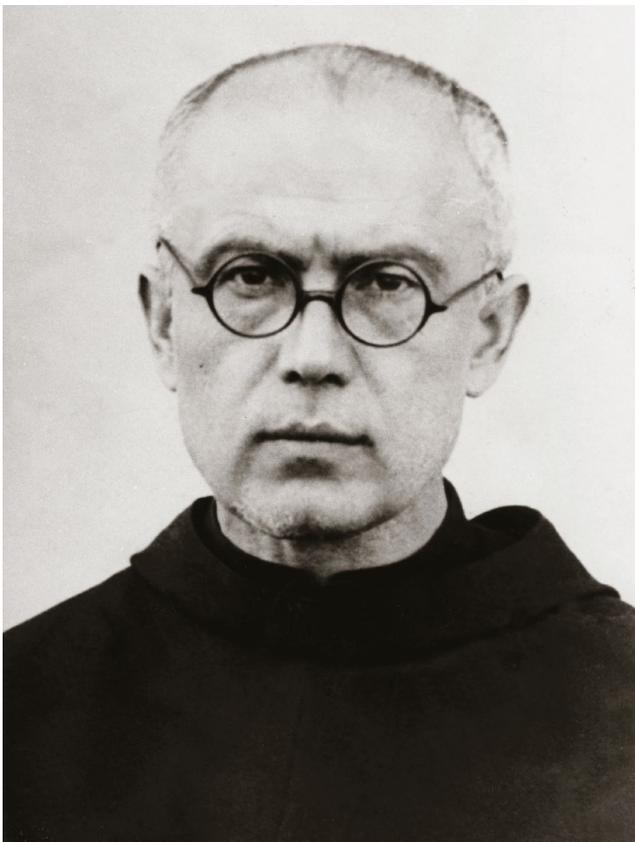
ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY FAITH

MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

By Dr Nicola Brady

'The most deadly poison of our times is indifference. And this happens, although the praise of God should know no limits. Let us strive, therefore, to praise Him to the greatest extent of our powers.'

St Maximilian Kolbe



Auschwitz is without parallel as a symbol of dehumanisation and cruelty, and yet it was in this place that St Maximilian Kolbe, through an extraordinary act of love, made a statement about the dignity and worth of the human person that has inspired people all over the world.

Clergy were among the first groups of people taken prisoner in the early days of the Nazi occupation of Poland and so the Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe found himself in Auschwitz. He was standing in the line-up when the SS selected ten prisoners for a mass punishment of death by starvation in retaliation for an escape. One of the inmates being dragged off to the punishment block cried out for his wife and children and Maximilian Kolbe was moved to volunteer to take his place. Inexplicably, the otherwise merciless SS permitted this act of mercy.

It was a life-giving sacrifice on many levels; not only did the man he saved, Franciszek Gajowniczek, survive to return to his family, but he became a lay missionary, working to make Kolbe's sacrifice an enduring light in the darkness of Auschwitz. Kolbe's warning about the danger of indifference is today echoed by survivors of the Holocaust, who remind us that the roots of this horror can be traced back to the indifference of people to the othering, isolation and humiliation of their neighbours, which quickly escalated during the war into discrimination, persecution and murder.

Auschwitz survivor Marian Turcki says 'as you listen to me speak as a witness to this past, ask yourself where you are called to be a witness today'.

FR LUDWIK MROCZEK SDB

By Dr Alasdair Richardson



Fr Ludwik was saying Mass when the Gestapo arrived to arrest him. The charismatic young priest was a talented youth worker with an ability to draw young people to the church. He had been ordained as a Salesian priest just a few years earlier, having been drawn to their mission to work with the young and underprivileged.

He was one of 12 Salesians arrested over a few days in Kraków in May 1941. The Gestapo falsely accused him of involvement with underground resistance. Such charges were a common fabrication against clergy, who the Nazis saw as a threat to their authority in occupied Poland. They were imprisoned in nearby

Montelupich Prison, where they were brutally interrogated, before being deported to Auschwitz on 26th June 1941.

Upon arrival, he was Fr Ludwik no longer – instead he was known to his captors only as ‘Prisoner No. 17340’. Priests were treated particularly cruelly at Auschwitz (second only to the treatment of Jewish prisoners), and on the first day, four of his brother Salesians were murdered. Fr Ludwik received terrible injuries from repeated beatings at the hands of the guards. He developed a severe bacterial inflammation and was sent to the camp ‘hospital’. Despite being in terrible pain, he had an extraordinary faith and treated his situation as an opportunity to continue to minister to others – praying with the prisoners and hearing their confessions. Fellow prisoners called him a “titan of suffering” who brought hope and comfort to them.

Fr Ludwik succumbed to his injuries on 5th January 1942. He was 36 years old.

One of the doctors who cared for him commented that “if we did not have such priests, we would have been a hundred times worse and more awful than we are.”

In many ways he was an ordinary and humble man, who lived out his vocation showing extraordinary faith and care for others. May he rest in peace.

*!...if we did not have such priests,
we would have been a hundred
times worse and more awful than
we are.!*

*Dr Turschid,
Auschwitz-Birkenau*

ANNE FRANK

By Tim Robertson

'If you're wondering whether it's harder for the adults here [hiding from the Nazis] than for the children, the answer is no, it's certainly not. Older people have an opinion about everything and are sure of themselves and their actions. It's twice as hard for us young people to hold on to our opinions at a time when ideals are being shattered and destroyed, when the worst side of human nature pre-dominates, when everyone has come to doubt truth, justice and God.

...Ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.

It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more. In the mean time, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realise them!'

Anne Frank, diary entry of Saturday 15 July 1944

When 15-year-old Anne Frank wrote these words, she, her parents, her sister and four other Jewish people had been hiding in the secret annexe of an Amsterdam warehouse for over 2 years. Less than 3 weeks later, their hiding place was discovered by the Nazis and they were deported to concentration camps. Anne's father Otto was the only one of them to survive.

We will never know whether Anne continued to cling to her faith in humanity – “people are truly good at heart” – as she wasted away from disease and starvation in the appalling circumstances of Bergen-Belsen, just a few weeks before it was liberated in spring 1945. But we can see clearly in the text that this faith, along with the strong Jewish religion expressed elsewhere in the Diary, was far from naively held. While in many ways an ordinary teenager, Anne's extraordinary genius as a writer is her emotional and



spiritual complexity – her ability to inspire us convincingly with hope (“peace and tranquillity will return”) at the same time as looking unflinchingly at the bleakness of her fate (“the approaching thunder that...will destroy us”). And it is Nature or God – “when I look up at the sky” – that pivots or mediates between these two apparently disparate truths.

Anne both did and did not realise her ideals. Thanks to the remarkable generosity and foresight of her father, who published her Diary in 1947, she achieved posthumously all her dreams of becoming a famous author. More than anything else written during the Second World War, her masterpiece has brought home, especially to non-Jewish readers, the human reality of being Jewish under the Nazis. In plays, films, fiction, music, visual arts and social media she has become a global cultural phenomenon. She has generated an international movement of anti-prejudice education programmes in her name. She has inspired world leaders from JF Kennedy to Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama.

But at times this astonishing expanse of influence can overwhelm the actual reason why Anne's life was so viciously cut short – the simple, human, beautiful fact that she was Jewish.

ETTY HILLESUM

By Revd Canon Dr Sharon Prentis

There are those who, during their lifetime, tread gently on the earth. They are individuals who draw little attention to themselves but whose curiosity, courage, and convictions leave footprints that continue to reverberate long after they have gone. Etty Hillesum is one of them.

Born in the Netherlands of Jewish heritage, Etty's spiritual insights during Nazi occupation were chronicled in her diaries. She had an extraordinary sense of what service to other people meant. An entry from 1943 states, 'wherever you happen to find yourself, be there with your whole heart. If your heart is elsewhere, you won't give enough to the community you happen to be, and that community will be the poorer for it.'

As things became more difficult under the occupation, Hetty's work did not diminish. Instead, her motivation to help others increased, putting her at even greater risk of internment. Amid the growing hostility of the times, her diaries reveal a strength from her reliance on the Lord God, whom she considered her 'high tower'.

Hetty lived hopefully with courage founded on solidarity with others and the willingness to share in their suffering.

'Wherever you happen to find yourself, be there with your whole heart. If your heart is elsewhere, you won't give enough to the community you happen to be, and that community will be the poorer for it.'

Etty Hillesum



A REFLECTION

HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP ANGAELOS OBE

On Holocaust Memorial Day we do not only remember those who have lost their lives to heinous murderous acts of the greatest treachery but those who until our present day suffer for their faith, religion, belief, or conviction.

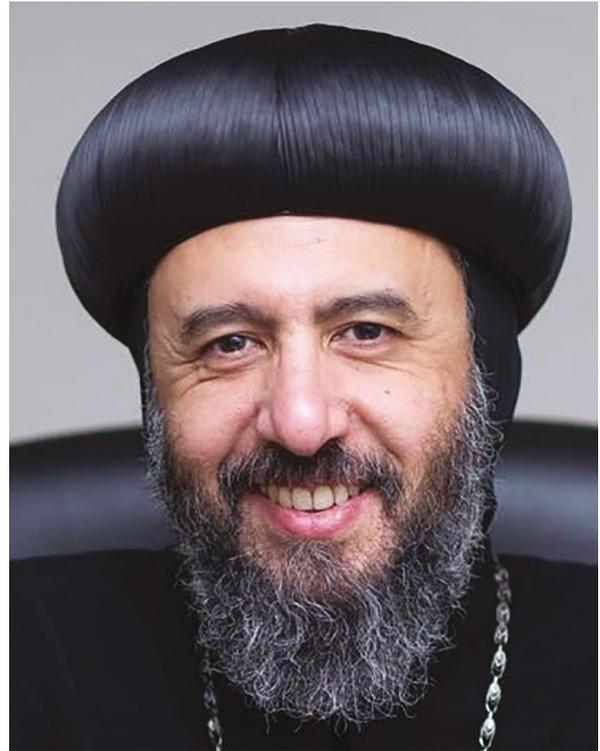
Although decades have passed, we seem to have learned little in the way of dealing with ideologies that will demonise and dehumanise others just because they are different to those who hold them.

In this 21st century, when we pride ourselves on the greatest technological advancements and on insight that apparently surpasses those who have preceded us, we still often fail to not only prioritise, but to place as sacred and untouchable, the sanctity of every life and the dignity with which that life must be lived.

As we mark Holocaust Memorial Day this year we pray for those who have so tragically been lost to us, while praying comfort for their families, loved ones and communities who often continue to live that loss on a daily basis.

On this day we also pray for our world, that a changing of hearts and minds may lead us to a new place of mutual respect and acceptance that allows us to walk our own journey with whatever that entails, while at the same time leaving space for others who may be different to walk alongside us in the hope that the world we leave for those who will come after us is better in many ways than the one we have received.

His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos OBE,
Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London and
Papal Legate to the United Kingdom



'Although decades have passed, we seem to have learned little in the way of dealing with ideologies that will demonise and dehumanise others just because they are different to those who hold them.'

PRAYERS

A PRAYER FOR HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 2023: ORDINARY PEOPLE

From the Council of Christians and Jews

Loving God, you care for each and every human life. All people are cherished as your beloved children, no matter how ordinary or extraordinary their stories are.

Today we come before you to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

We lament the loss of the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust, the millions of other victims of Nazi persecution, and victims of all genocides.

May our minds be clear and attentive to their memory, and our hearts be moved to bear witness to their lives.

Help us all to turn away from hatred and division, and to build a world where genocide is no more.

Strengthen us so that we, in our own ordinary ways, may show extraordinary love in the world today.

Amen.

A PRAYER FOR ALL GENOCIDES

By Sbermara Fletcher

Eternal, loving and creator God, we place before you all those who suffer at the hands of genocide.

Eternal God, we pray for those whose homes, families and lives have been destroyed through this evil conflict.

Loving God, comfort those who live with the perpetual anticipation of terror and the souls of everyday ordinary victims who have never been found.

Creator God, we pray for a change in the hearts of those who commit the atrocity of genocide that is rooted in conflict, a misplaced thirst for power, greed, and selfish personal and nationalist ambition. This destroys the beauty of community in your ordered creation.

We pray for an end to the shedding of innocent blood. We pray for an end to genocide.

Amen.

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN JEWISH RELATIONS

By Dr Clare Amos

Gracious God,

*You listen attentively to the cry of
holocaust yet also encourage us to
sing the song of hope.*

*With sorrow we remember before
you the tangled tale of our bonds
with the Jewish people.*

*We repent of the centuries of hostility
and hatred.*

*May we continue to foster a new
spirit of mutual understanding,
building deeper relationships which
honour the heritage of faith that we
hold in common, so that together we
may bear witness to the generosity of
God's compassion and steadfast love,
which seeks to bring heaven in
ordinary here on earth.*

Amen.

CONTRIBUTOURS

The Council of Christians and Jews are thankful to all those who have contributed prayers and reflections to this resource.



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FURTHER RESOURCES

For more information about CCJ, our work and other resources, please see:
www.ccj.org.uk

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

Holocaust Educational Trust:
www.het.org.uk

Yad Vashem:
www.yadvashem.org

Generation 2 Generation (G2G):
G2G provides trained speakers to tell their family Holocaust stories integrating eyewitness survivor testimony and family artefacts
www.generation2generation.org.uk

Whatever you are planning for Holocaust Memorial Day, please let us know at cjrelations@ccj.org.uk and/or share your event with HMDT directly on their interactive map:
www.hmd.org.uk/take-part-in-holocaust-memorial-day/activities-form

Resource designed by Richard Bloom
www.tigerpink.co.uk

Self-Portrait, Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943).
Villefranche-sur-Mer, 1939–1941.
Crayon on paper. Collection of the Yad Vashem Art
Museum, Jerusalem.
Gift of Otilie Gobel Bourne, Washington State.
Photo © Yad Vashem Art Museum.



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