

Tennessee Holocaust Commission 2025 Educators and Clergy Trip to Poland

Notes for Keeping a Journal of Your Experience- Ron Galbraith

Given our roles with students and congregants, this trip promises to be personally and professionally enlightening, providing each of us a first-hand sense of the land, history and culture of Poland-then and now. Beyond that, the focus on the realities of the Holocaust may have more of an emotional impact than we might image at this point-I feel that will happen with me.

Personally, I hope to hold onto this unique experience, to capture the feelings as well as the facts. Keeping a journal will help me do that. Some may be well experienced at keeping a journal. Perhaps you do this when you travel. Or perhaps this is a regular habit of recording your day, week or specific experience. Perhaps you use this approach to preserve thoughts, sketch plans, capture quotes or outline ideas for a project, class or even a presentation. If so, you know the value of documenting your reflections and observations. No doubt you have also found the value of returning to those notes to refresh that feeling, idea or even the exact phrase you might have used as you made the entry in your journal at the time.

Some of us journal in a favorite notebook or diary and others may have gone “all digital” on smart phone or iPad. And, yes, some may not need or use this tool at all. If, however, you choose to use your journal to capture this experience, here are some tips on how to take home a journal that you might reference for years to come.

Tips for Daily Journaling:

- **Start each entry with the date and location:** This helps track your journey chronologically.
- **Engage your senses:** Describe what you see, smell, hear, taste, and feel in the moment at any part of your day.
- **Reflect your emotions:** Document your thoughts, feelings, reactions-even doubts-as you experience any part of a day.
- **Keep track of things you want to remember later:** Take notes on any presentation from a guide or discussion among the group—use your own system for referencing other materials used in a session so that you can combine corollary material with your journal later.
- **Note cultural insights:** Capture your observations about the local culture, customs, and traditions as you notice them. Note the small details that make your trip unique, like the taste of local food or the sounds at a market—even an unexpected silence you might notice.
- **Prepare to share:** Capture your ideas for sharing this experience with others when you return, including ideas you learn from colleagues on this trip.

If the categories above do not stimulate your ‘journaling juices,” try these simple daily questions:

- What did you eat today? Describe the flavor and the experience.
- What is your first impression of a place/event/conversation?
- What surprised you today?
- What is the one thing from today that you will never forget?
- What will you tell your family, a friend, a group who asks about what you experienced on this day?

Near the end of our week...

- Imagine that you are going to begin a 15-minute presentation and/or discussion of the Holocaust with your specific audience. As you begin, you take one minute to set the stage by verbally sharing an image of something you saw on this trip—what will they visualize from your one-minute opening?

With the end in mind: With your personal journal in hand as you board the plane to leave, you will have written a short but profound story of how you experienced seven days in Poland. No one else can write this story.