



A Word from the Chair- Rabbi Mark Schifftan

The greatest highlight and honor of my initial year as Commission Chair was the pilgrimage to Poland with our teachers and clergy. To share the experience with these wonderful human souls, who have dedicated their professional lives towards the teaching the universal lessons of the Holocaust to the emerging generations of our state, and who continue to teach the ethical and moral implications of the degradation of human dignity to their congregations, was truly moving and inspiring in countless ways. We definitely served as witnesses to the Shoah. Though it was an extremely difficult journey in terms of what we saw, and felt, the time spent in those death camps definitely enhanced our focus, not only as individuals, but even more, on the importance of the sacred mission of the Tennessee Holocaust Commission.



Photo (left): Rabbi Schifftan taking a moment at a memorial near the site of ashes of Holocaust victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Commission Group Ventures on Nine-Day Tour in Poland

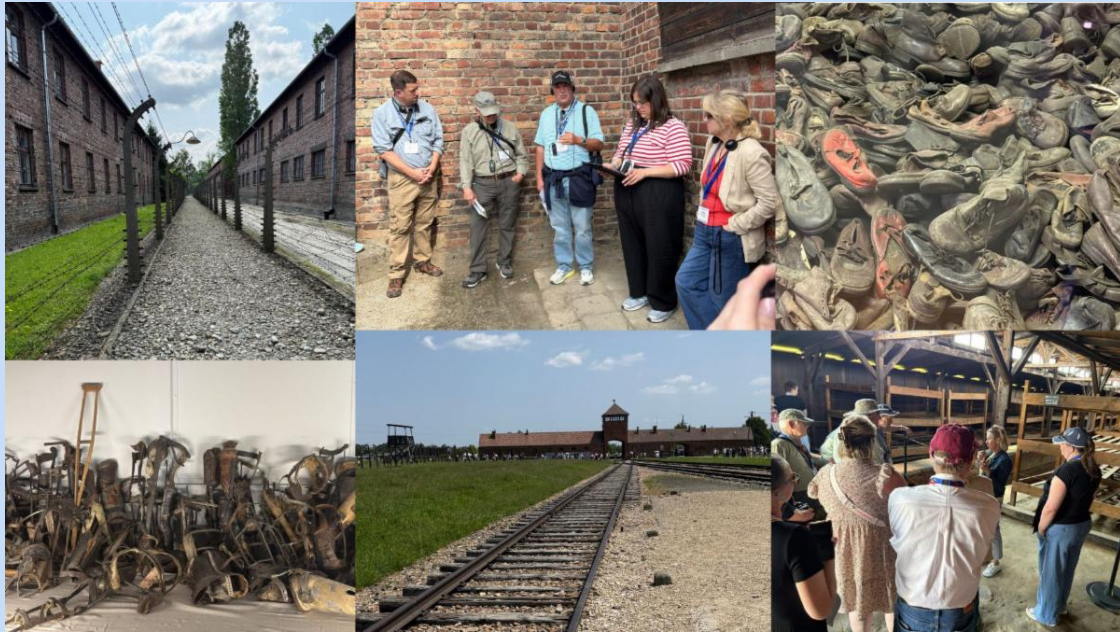


On June 11th, the staff of the Tennessee Holocaust Commission and Chair Rabbi Mark Schifftan embarked on a nine-day trip to Poland. Accompanying the team were fifteen Teacher Fellows who consistently partnered with the Commission for the past two years, and a group of ten Jewish and Christian clergy members who also work with the Commission to bring Holocaust education to their communities and congregations. Organized through

Ayelet Tours Ltd., the team of educators and clergy were led by a world-class tour guide, **Jolanta**, who guided the group to historic sites central to the Holocaust in Warsaw and Krakow.

Bearing Witness at Auschwitz

On June 13, the group spent a full day at the infamous Nazi death camp, Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Though guided through the camp in groups, each member found time to somberly reflect on deeply personal levels. In one stirring moment, Rabbis Mark Schifftan and Michael Danziger and Cantor Tracy Fishbein led the group in prayer and song. After touring Auschwitz I, the group arrived at Birkenau and bore witness at the site where an estimated 1.5 million Jewish people were murdered. That evening, the group met to reflect on the experience of visiting Auschwitz. Also discussed was how the experiences would shape classroom instruction and what messages would be shared in the clergy's congregations.



Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau Photos Above: (Top Row) L: Double set of barbed wire fencing with Auschwitz barracks in background; C: Stopping for a moment of reflection near the Death Wall outside Block 11; R: Shoes and (Bottom Row L) artificial limbs and accessibility aids of some of the many murdered people; C: Train track ending at Birkenau; R: Inside barracks at Birkenau

The next day of the tour involved guided stops throughout the historic city of Krakow. This day allowed the group to engage with Jonathan Ornstein at the Jewish Community Center and visit historic Remuh Synagogue in the Kazimierz district. Participants also saw medieval sites in the city, Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory, remnants of the Krakow Ghetto Wall and toured Plaszow Labor Camp on the outskirts of Krakow.

To Warsaw!

We have to know and remember who we had, to understand who we lost. A goal of the trip was to encourage educators and clergy to enhance knowledge of prewar Jewish life. The group traveled from Krakow to Warsaw, where we enjoyed a thorough tour of the POLIN Museum of the Polish Jews. Following the tour, the group took photos at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and with the statue of Holocaust hero, Jan Karski.

The Most Soul-Wrenching Experience: Treblinka

There are no words to accurately articulate the power of witnessing Treblinka Death Camp. For many on the trip, the solemn journey from Warsaw to Treblinka proved the most moving of the week in Poland. A ninety-minute journey by bus from Warsaw, Treblinka is surrounded by dense forest, quiet farms, and storks nesting on rooftops. And yet, Treblinka was the most lethal of the six Nazi death camps. In approximately 13 months, an estimated

900,000 Jewish people were murdered. In contrast to Auschwitz, the camp did not have a labor camp attached to it, and functioned only to murder the victims. During our two-hour visit, many placed stones of remembrance at poignant places throughout the camp. Several individuals reflected on the quietness of the camp while many others noted that the horrific cacophony seemed still audible. Though experienced together, the visit to Treblinka affected everyone on a profoundly individual level.



Treblinka Photos Above: Top Row L: Path to where the gas chambers once stood; R: where a memorial now stands in memory of those murdered here; C: Saying Kaddish and reflecting on what happened on these grounds; Bottom Row: Over 17,000 stones stand in memory of the 900,000 victims killed here. 216 stones bear names of cities and towns where the murdered were from.

One day, the group had a free afternoon to experience Warsaw. Many joined the tour guide and native Varsovian, **Jolanta**, on a tour of Warsaw's historic old city. Others departed for the Warsaw Rising Museum which explores the history of the 1944 uprising against the Nazis.

Our final day in Poland focused on Jewish life in Warsaw before, during, and after the Holocaust. This day brought our group into conversation about life after the Shoah, and allowed us to engage with Jewish community members in Warsaw. Our evening concluded with discussion of the messages we could bring to our classrooms, congregations, and communities.





The Year In Numbers

6: Commission Exhibits Displayed around the State
9: Programs hosted at Institutions of Higher Education
15: Teacher Fellows journeyed to Poland to witness Holocaust sites in person
27: Community Presentations
38: School Speaking Engagements by Survivors or 2G
300: Copies of Living On dispersed to teachers and community members of Tennessee
1800: Hours of Professional Development Earned by Tennessee Educators
5000: Students reached with presentations by Survivors or 2G

Belz-Lipman Award deadline has been extended through August 31, 2025. This award is granted to Educators for Excellence in Holocaust Education: up to a \$1500 grant for educators to use in their classroom or on furthering their own Holocaust education. This opportunity is sponsored by the Belz and Lipman families of Memphis, TN. Submissions for this cycle will close August 31, 2025. Apply today!

\$1500
Educator Grant
Apply Today!

Belz-Lipman Award Application

Upcoming Events: (stay tuned for more as the calendar fills up)

July 29: Roane County Schools Professional Development
August 5: Sevier County Schools Professional Development
September 26-27: Remembering WWII Event (Linden)
September 29-Nov 9: Americans and the Holocaust Exhibit, King Family Library (Sevierville)
October 16: Roundtable with Interfaith Clergy, 6-8pmET (Sevierville)
21: Survivor Mark Schonwetter, Maryville College (Maryville)
23: Survivor Mark Schonwetter, 6pm ET, King Family Library, (Sevierville)
27: Beyond Night: Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust with Alison Vick 6-8pmET (408 High Street, Sevierville)
November: Interfaith Webinar 3 Night Series (tentative)
January: Virtual Commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day
February 21: Austin Peay State University, One Day Conference (Clarksville)
May: Carnegie Center for Arts and History, Exhibit and Program (Jackson)

If you are interested in having a speaker or exhibit at your school or community group, please contact us at tnholcom@tnholcom.org