

# Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

Holocaust Memorial Day 27th January 2021

## Be the Light in the Darkness

### 1. Teacher's Note

This year's theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is 'Be the light in the darkness'. It encourages everyone to reflect on the depths humanity can sink to, but also the ways individuals and communities resisted that darkness to 'be the light' before, during and after genocide.

Be the light in the darkness is an affirmation and a call to action for everyone marking HMD. This theme asks us to consider different kinds of 'darkness', for example, identity-based persecution, misinformation, denial of justice; and different ways of 'being the light', for example, resistance, acts of solidarity, rescue and illuminating mistruths. HMD marks the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp.

### 2. A Bradford Story for HMD 2021



#### Dietrich Bonhoeffer - A Light in the Darkness

A light can make us feel safe in a dark place, sometimes in troubled times individuals and groups of people may be like lights, they resist bad people and try to protect those who are threatened and in danger. They are a light in the darkness. This is a short story about a man, who visited Bradford in 1933, who shone like a light in an attempt to protect others from persecution.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian, German priest. He was a member of the German Protestant Church, but he didn't always agree with their actions. Dietrich didn't live in Bradford, but he did visit here in 1933 to attend a conference of German Protestant priests, held at the German Evangelical church in Little Horton.

Hitler's National Socialist party (the Nazis) were in control in Germany. Instead of one human race the Nazis claimed there were different races and that the White, European, race was superior (better) than others. They claimed White people were better than Black, men better than women; people with disabilities, Gypsies, Roma

and Eastern European people were seen as inferior and Jews or people of Jewish descent, were particularly victimised.

The Nazis began to impose laws that discriminated against Jews. For example Jewish children could not go to schools with non-Jewish children, or be treated in a hospital with non-Jews. Jews could not work in the government. Eventually Jews were not allowed to ride bicycles, go to the cinema, keep pets or do a range of things which infringed on their everyday life.

Dietrich was right to speak out. Eventually in 1938 Jewish men, women and children were openly attacked during the night of breaking glass - Kristalnacht. The situation got even worse; Jews began to be arrested, imprisoned, forced to work as slaves and murdered by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945.

It was not the Jewish religion that the Nazis were opposed to as much as the Jews as a people, to the extent that they demanded that Jews who converted to Christianity, should be expelled from the church and not be accepted as Christians. The German Protestant Church leaders were coerced into expelling people who were from Jewish backgrounds and telling the Nazis who they were. This often led to Christians of Jewish descent initially being imprisoned and later being killed by the Nazis, just for being Jewish. Many members of the German Church thought this was all very wrong and challenged the church and the Nazis. They were like lights in a very dark place.

Dietrich spoke out at the conference in Bradford against the Nazis' racism and the way in which some members of the church, if not supporting, were not opposing, Adolf Hitler's policies against the Jewish people. Dietrich was outspoken about the Nazis. He challenged their racist laws and propaganda and the idea that Christians with Jewish backgrounds should be expelled from the church. He stood up and spoke out. *He shone in the darkness, like a light that refused to be blown out!*

At the Bradford conference he convinced other people that to help Hitler persecute Jewish people was wrong. A declaration was made and signed in the church in 1933. A declaration is a statement of intention or belief. This Bradford Declaration condemned any agreement between the Church and the Nazis, which would lead to the persecution of Jewish people in Germany.

After the conference Dietrich bravely returned to Germany where he continued to preach and write articles, arguing for a just church, speaking out against racism and highlighting and challenging the persecution of the Jews. His light continued to burn, a symbol of hope in what very dangerous times for many, many people.

The end of Dietrich's story is not a happy one. He was eventually arrested by the Nazis for speaking out and defending the Jewish people. He spent much of the Second World War imprisoned for his beliefs and actions. Eventually he was executed on the 9th April, 1945 at Flossenburg Concentration Camp. He remained a light until the end, determined to let others know that someone cared about them and their right to a life free from hate, fear and persecution.

Today the building where the Bradford Declaration was signed is known as the German Church and Delius Centre, after the famous composer. Delius's parents donated money (along with other German families in Bradford in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) to build the church. It is still a place where different Christian groups worship and where people (of all faiths and none) come together to socialise, be creative and challenge prejudice, it remains a place where there is still a 'light in the darkness'.



In 2008 a new Bradford Declaration against hatred and racism was signed in the church. A candle was lit by a member of Bradford's small Jewish community, who himself lost 12 members of his family, murdered by the Nazis in Germany. The light was lit in memory of all those who died (six million plus) and also to signify that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's light is still burning bright in the darkness; a symbol of peace and hope for the future.

### 3. Links for Holocaust Memorial Day 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Theme:** Light the Darkness

**Activities and information for schools:** <https://www.hmd.org.uk/take-part-in-holocaust-memorial-day/schools/>

#### **Light a Candle Together**

Light a candle and put it in your window at 8pm on 27 January 2021 (if you are able to do so safely).

**Hash tags:** #HolocaustMemorialDay #LightTheDarkness

**Find out more here:** <https://www.hmd.org.uk/uk-holocaust-memorial-day-2021-ceremony/>

### 4. Simple Activities for Children

- ❖ Write a new Bradford Declaration, simply 'I declare that I .....
- ❖ Draw and colour a candle with a flame, write on the candle or the flame a wish for the future 'I can be a light in the darkness by/if .....
- ❖ Light a candle (via Zoom if necessary, but best in a darkened classroom) collect words of peace and comfort that the light generates
- ❖ Discuss how Christians and all the world's major religions use light as a symbol of good; discuss how people who do not have a religion, also use

lights as a symbol of celebration and hope e.g. fireworks at New Year, tree lights, birthday candles, fairy lights during the Pandemic etc.

- ❖ Design a Bonhoeffer poster (see below) or a poster for HMD 2021.

**Photo credits:**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Wissen911 - Bettina Rott: Wilhelm Rott, 1908–1967:

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Rudi Lever at the German Church: Bradford Telegraph and Argus.

Bonhoeffer quote: Wikimedia Commons.

