

## **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—Yahad-In Unum Relationship**

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's close working relationship with Father Patrick Desbois (Advisor, Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews; and President, Yahad-In Unum: Catholics and Jews Together) began in 2004. Paul Shapiro (Director, Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies) arranged to meet with Father Desbois, who at the time served as personal secretary to Paris's Archbishop Emeritus Cardinal Lustiger. Lustiger had emerged as one of Europe's strongest voices in the battle against reemerging antisemitism, and with the encouragement of the Museum's Academic Committee and Committee on Church Relations, Shapiro was seeking opportunities to consult with Europeans who had taken a firm stance on the issue. During that first meeting Father Desbois outlined his project to identify mass shooting sites in Ukraine and to take video testimony from surviving eyewitnesses. The two met again at the Vatican's commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Nostra Aetate in Rome, where Cardinal Lustiger made one of the principal presentations on the necessity for Catholic-Jewish cooperation. Shapiro invited the Yahad team, which had already identified several hundred mass graves of Jewish victims across Ukraine, to the Museum to corroborate their research findings and testimonies with documentation available in the Museum's nearly 40-million-page archive of Holocaust documentation, which included a rapidly growing collection of former Soviet and Ukrainian archival material.

The relationship has grown dramatically since then.

The Yahad team has visited the Museum five times to conduct research in the archives, consult with the Center's research scholars with expertise on Ukraine, and develop plans for future cooperative work. Father Desbois briefed the Committee on Church Relations and Museum leadership on the preliminary results of his project, including a presentation of video clips from his interviews and photographic evidence of the mass graves. He also participated in a roundtable with Center scholars Martin Dean and Wendy Lower on the current state of research on the Holocaust in Ukraine; and a roundtable presentation on Jewish-Christian relations and the Resurgence of Antisemitism with Victoria Barnett, Staff Director of the Committee on Church Relations and committee member Father Kevin Spicer, Associate Professor at Stonehill College.

Following this, Father Desbois participated with Museum Director Sara Bloomfield in the Museum's 2006 Days of Remembrance program; and in a high-level confidential consultation at the Museum of 13 international experts who explored the background and resurgence of antisemitism in the United States, Europe, and the Islamic world. With Father Desbois's support, Cardinal Lustiger spoke at the Museum in 2006 and led a discussion about contemporary interfaith relations with Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious leaders.

The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, Yahad-In Unum, the Memorial de la Shoah (CDJC) in Paris, and the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne co-sponsored and co-organized a major international scholarly conference on the Holocaust in Ukraine, which included a presentation of the results of the Museum's partnership with Father Desbois in documenting and providing testimony regarding the more than one million Jews murdered in that country by the Nazis and their allies. The conference, entitled "The Holocaust in Ukraine: New Resources and

Perspectives,” took place October 1-3, 2007, in Paris. Sessions were held at the Sorbonne and at the Memorial de la Shoah, where an exhibition on this subject is currently on display.

Throughout the relationship, the Museum has worked closely with Father Desbois on issues relating to Vatican archives. We are also in discussion concerning the establishment of a program on the Holocaust at a planned new Catholic University in Paris, where the Museum has offered assistance and involvement through its network of staff and visiting scholar program alumni.

Paul Shapiro said, “This is a unique partnership in many ways. It is international, interfaith, interdisciplinary, and 100 percent mutually beneficial. Father Desbois’s remarkable testimonies are giving increased credibility to Soviet-era documentation of the Holocaust that many people had a tendency to question. And the Museum’s rich archival holdings are making it very clear that what eyewitnesses are reporting to Father Desbois and his team today must be accepted and treated as authentic eyewitness testimony, a totally unique and reliable source, despite the passage of 60 years since the events took place. No one who witnessed such horrors could possibly forget it, and these witnesses, who saw their neighbors being murdered, are making an important contribution to our understanding of the full fury and ferocity of the Holocaust. We owe our thanks to Patrick Desbois for this.”