

## ACTIVITIES

Maintenance work on Jewish cemeteries (Beth-Chayim) is done by Christian volunteers of various denominations. We spend several days or weeks of our vacation every year for this purpose.

Tombstones are cleaned, algae growth and moss are removed, tilted stones are straightened up and - where possible - damaged ones are repaired. The text on the stones is repainted. Trees are pruned and overgrowing weeds are cleared. Sometimes a new gateway has to be made; elsewhere existing gates just need a fresh coat of paint. Existing buildings in the grounds may need a new roof or new doors; rust is removed from fences and they receive a new coating.

The entire cost of tools and materials needed for repair work is paid by members of the group or by the foundation. Our work is supported by the organization of Christian churches for relations between Church and Israel.

## THE NETHERLANDS

Teams of 15 to 100 people have been working on Jewish cemeteries in our own country since 1985.

The work is done with the rabbinate's consent.

The Dutch Israeli Community annually points out one or more cemeteries where maintenance work is most needed. Presently, restoration work has been done on more than 100 cemeteries.

## MOTIVATION

The members of the group are Christians, who feel a deep grief about the hostility towards Jews in the past. We are aware that it were Christians who discriminated against Jews, falsely accusing them of atrocities like ritual murder, water-poisoning etc.

For centuries, the Jewish people were accused of killing Jeshua of Nazareth. This hostility towards Jews degraded them and led to humiliation and expulsion, robbery and murder.

Together with many Christians all over the world, we feel deeply ashamed of our behaviour. Now, in a very different spirit, we would like deeds of friendship and help improve the relationship between Jews and Christians.

## HISTORY OF THE WORK GROUP

In 1974 we were told about the sad state of Warsaw's Jewish cemetery, which was completely neglected and overgrown.

Recognizing Warsaw's special significance as a place of tears for the whole Jewish people, we went there for three consecutive years, to weed, sweep, hack and rake the grounds.

During the evenings we walked through the streets of the former ghetto, mourning and expressing our grief for the pain caused to the Jews and for the lack of Christian help.

While in Warsaw we visited several former concentration camps, where we recited translated Hebrew prayers for the deceased. Again we were overwhelmed by the enormous tragedy of these "extermination factories".

Later we went to different places in Czechoslovakia, Ukraine and Moldavia to visit Jewish WWII mass graves, where we mourned for the horror the victims endured.

In the 1980's we visited German cities, where during the crusades, Christians made Jewish communities suffer deeply.

We wept over the enmity and violence towards the Jews.

In 1991 we visited Poland, Warsaw, Chelmno and Sobibor again, for the same purpose.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

In the late seventies the trials of several notorious war criminals took place in the Netherlands and in Germany. During that time many Jewish witnesses from different places, particularly Israel, had to come over for these trials. Left alone during the weekends with their terrible memories, we, as group, took care of them, invited them to our homes or organized some trips for them.

## RECONCILIATION

We are conscious that the crimes committed by Christians against the Jewish people are too enormous to forgive. Events have been so horrible that they can never be compensated. So our work should never be considered as a *Wiedergutmachung*. We can only think of the words of King David, to the Gibeonites after Israel's violent behaviour:

*"What can I do for you  
to rid ourselves of this guilt  
and to induce you to bless us?"*

Now we say the same words to the Jewish people.



Tilted and damaged headstones in a graveyard under repair.



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FOUNDATION  
FOR PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION  
WITH ISRAEL  
AND OTHERS

## **TASK FORCE FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND RESTORATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES**

**A CONTRIBUTION TO  
RECONCILIATION**

**A GESTURE OF FRIENDSHIP**