



## Shared Heritage program for Polish Christian Leadership

Forum for Dialogue\* | 01.09.2019

Being at the forefront of Polish/Jewish, we have seen the need to address the position of Christian churches and traditions in Polish/Jewish relations.

This year, in partnership with the Yad Vashem, we have launched [the Shared Heritage program](#) for Polish Christian Leadership. Given our experience in facing challenges and building bridges through education and dialogue, we identified people who can be the change-makers in their communities and invited them to take part in an intense program that for many was life-changing.

The Polish Christian leaders invited to join the Shared Heritage program made up a diverse group of people, including Catholics and Protestants, clergy, as well as journalists and activists. These are the people who partake in and oftentimes set the tone for the discourse about Jews, Judaism, and Polish/Jewish relations in Poland.

The program involved three seminars, first in Warsaw, then Jerusalem, and finally, Lodz. This was a complete and complex experience designed to resonate with the participants on an intellectual, emotional, as well as spiritual levels. There is no doubt in our minds that Polish Christians have to face the troubled history of Polish/Jewish relations, and the only way for them to do that is to have leaders able to address these issues from a place of sincerity and understanding not just of Jewish history in Poland, but of the ways in which this history has been transmitted in Jewish communities.

The program of the seminar in Israel was designed specially by the Yad Vashem for the Forum group and offered an in-depth analysis of the Israeli perspectives on the Polish/Jewish and Christian/Jewish challenging history and relations. This was helped immensely by Yehuda Bauer, an important figure of Holocaust studies, whose presence made a great impression on the participants. It was important for the program participants to be able to connect to people not just on an intellectual, but also personal level.

Finally, at the last seminar in Lodz, hosted by Archbishop Rys, we focused on workshopping ideas and solutions that the participants can implement immediately to improve the current situation. The presence of a high ranking church official sparked an intense and very frank discussion about the role and responsibilities of the church regarding Jews and Jewish history in Poland – a discussion that must be continued.

Who better to lead the way for change than the 20 dedicated and informed people who care about their communities and about the important connections they have with Jews and Judaism as Poles and as Christians? We already know the program has been impactful for them; we are looking forward to learning how they share the experience with their communities.

Editorial remarks

\* **"Forum for Dialogue"** is dedicated to inspiring new connections between contemporary Poland

and the Jewish people, working together with thought leaders, activists, teachers and students from Poland and from abroad. Forum for Dialogue foundation has worked in the field of Polish/Jewish dialogue since 1998. The foundation was established in Gliwice as Forum for Dialogue Among Nations (Forum Dialogu Między Narodami) and moved 2003 to Warsaw. Today the foundation works nationwide towards creating and empowering the community of activists involved in caring for local Jewish heritage. They cooperate with local community leaders and at the same time educate students in almost 50 schools all over Poland each year. The educational project School of Dialogue attracts ca. 1,200 participating students annually. Founder and current President of Forum for Dialogue is Andrzej Folwarczny. He is a former Member of the Polish National Parliament (Sejm) where he Chaired the Polish-Israeli Parliamentary Group. He is the co-editor of the anthology *Difficult Questions in Polish-Jewish Dialogue*, published in 2006. For further information visit the website of the foundation: [Forum for Dialogue](#).