

The Holocaust: Life over Death

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The Holocaust began after Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi party, came into office and was named Chancellor of Germany by President Paul Von Hindenburg in 1932. After Hitler finally gain full control of Germany, he and the Nazis tried to make it impossible for Jews to live

in Germany.

The Nazis boycotted the Jews businesses; they took their citizenship from them and created anti-Jew laws that striped Jews of all their rights. The Jews were forced from their homes and forced to live in crowded ghettos, in horrible conditions in which many of them died of starvation. The ghettos had become so overcrowded that the Nazis decided to start killing the Jews. The Nazis tricked the Jews by telling them that they were transporting them to a labor camp but they were really taking them to concentration camps and death camps. In 1943, a group of the Jews attacked the Nazis that were trying to transport them to the camps. This uprising of the Jews made the Nazis angry because the other Jews that were in concentration camps tried to rebel against them too. This made the Nazis even angrier to the point that they burned every ghetto down, building by building.

Thousands of Jews fled from Germany, and many of them made their way to the French village of Le Chambon-sur Lignon, to escape from being sent to the concentration and death camps.

An organized rescue effort began when a Pastor by the name of Andre Trocme of the Reformed Church of France, chose life over death. The Pastor, his wife, Magda and his assistant, Pastor Edouard Theis, and the residents of the Le Chambon-sur-Lignon pulled together and helped every Jew that came and asked for help. Everyone knew that the decision to help the Jews could cost them their life, but helped anyway.

They established contacts with the Quakers in Marseilles, who assisted in providing relief supplies. Pastor Trocme worked with a leading American Quaker, named Burns Chalmers, who said that he could get internees released from camps, but there was nowhere for them to go once

they were released. The Pastor told him that if he was able to negotiate the release of the Jews then he can find shelter for them. The refugees were released and the Pastor kept his word. The residents of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and other organizations pulled together and all help the refugees by providing them with shelter, food, clothing, and false identity documents. The children even attended school in order to maintain an appearance of normalcy and to conceal the presence of Jews in the communities; they frequently attended Protestant religious services. Word got out that Le Chambon was known as the safe haven for refuge. More and more Jews traveled there. The Pastor and others continued to help even though they knew their lives on the line. Whenever the villagers heard that the Police were coming, they would hide the refugees further in countryside, escorting some of them to the Swiss border.

The Germans Police came to the village and arrested the Pastor, his assistant, and a teacher and held them for about 28 day and then let them go. Once they were released they started right helping the refuges. The Germans came back again and made several arrest and sent then to concentration camps where they later died or were murdered.

The people of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon village put their lives on the line to help save as many Jews as they could. In 1990, the State of Israel recognized all of the inhabitants of Le Chambon and those of nearby villages collectively as “Righteous Among the Nations.” Together their actions saved many. The village of Le Chambon and its neighboring villages offer an exceptional example of a collective rescue effort during the Holocaust.

Reference Page:

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Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

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<http://www.ushmm.org>