

Dear Friends,

Have we learnt anything from history, or are we once again allowing hatred to take root while convincing ourselves that it cannot happen again?

On 9 November, we attended a Kristallnacht commemoration service. It was a deeply sobering occasion, reminding us of one of the darkest chapters in human history and the devastating consequences of allowing antisemitism to take root, spread and ultimately become state-sanctioned persecution.

Yet, what made this year's commemoration particularly confronting was the reality unfolding in our world today.

On the eve of the 88th anniversary of Kristallnacht, Jewish-owned restaurants in Philadelphia became the targets of an organised boycott protest. Dozens of masked cyclists rode through the city targeting restaurants owned by Jewish Americans. What followed was a powerful response: a much larger crowd of counter-protesters gathered to support the businesses, filling the restaurants and drowning out the demonstration with expressions of solidarity.

The timing was deeply disturbing. In 1938, Jewish businesses were smashed, looted and destroyed because their owners were Jewish. In 2026, Jewish-owned businesses were once again being singled out and targeted. The circumstances are not identical, and we must be careful not to equate every contemporary event with the Holocaust. But the echoes of history are difficult to ignore.

People have the right to express political opinions and disagree with governments. But when individuals and businesses are targeted because they are Jewish, we must have the courage to recognise and challenge antisemitism.

As a Sister stood at the commemoration service, her thoughts turned not only about those who suffered and perished, but also about her own grandfather, a Hungarian Jew who recognised the warning signs of antisemitism in 1933 and left Europe for England.

Many of the family members he left behind would never survive the war.

His story makes this history deeply personal. It reminds us that behind every historical event are real people, families, broken relationships and generations whose lives were forever changed.

And so the questions remain: Have we really learnt from history? How far must hatred progress before we recognise the danger? And where will we, as Christians and as humanity, stand when Jewish people are once again targeted?

This is not simply a reflection on what happened in 1938. It is a challenge to what is happening in our world today and a call to ensure that the lessons of Kristallnacht are never forgotten, ignored or repeated.

The road to Kristallnacht:

It began long before the glass was broken

There are moments in history that should never be forgotten, not simply because of the terrible things that happened, but because of what they reveal about the human heart, the dangers of silence and the devastating consequences of allowing hatred to grow unchecked.

Kristallnacht, remembered as the Night of Broken Glass, is one such moment. On 9 and 10 November 1938, Jewish communities across Germany and its annexed territories experienced an eruption of organised violence. Synagogues were set ablaze, Jewish-owned businesses were smashed and looted, homes were invaded, people were beaten and murdered, and approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

More than 1,400 synagogues were destroyed or damaged. Streets were covered with the shattered glass of shopfronts and windows. But the broken glass was only the visible evidence of something far more devastating: a society in which hatred had been allowed to become acceptable, discrimination had become policy, and the dignity of an entire people had been systematically stripped away.

Yet Kristallnacht did not happen overnight. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933, the persecution of Jewish people entered a new and devastating chapter.

The Nazi regime did not begin with the mass destruction of Jewish communities. It began by changing the way society viewed them.

Words became weapons. Propaganda shaped public opinion. Jewish people were increasingly portrayed as outsiders, enemies and a threat to the nation. Their loyalty was questioned, their contributions dismissed, and their presence presented as a problem that needed to be solved.

In April 1933, a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses was organised. Jewish civil servants were excluded from government employment, and further restrictions progressively removed Jewish people from professional, economic, educational and public life.

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stripped Jews of German citizenship and prohibited marriages between Jews and people classified as German or of related blood.

By 1938, the restrictions had intensified. Jewish businesses were being forcibly transferred to non-Jewish ownership. Jewish professionals were losing their livelihoods. Jewish passports were marked with the letter 'J', and Jewish people were increasingly denied the right to participate in ordinary public life.

Think about what this meant. People who had lived in Germany for generations, built businesses, contributed to society, raised families and considered Germany their home were suddenly being told they did not belong.

Their neighbours were still their neighbours, but increasingly they were treated differently. Their businesses were still standing, but customers were discouraged from entering. Their children still wanted to attend school, but doors were being closed to them.

The process was gradual enough for many people to become accustomed to it. That is the danger. When discrimination is introduced incrementally, people can become desensitised. What would once have been considered outrageous becomes familiar. What was once unacceptable becomes tolerated. And what is tolerated can eventually become normalised.

On the night of 9 November 1938, the Nazi leadership orchestrated violence across Germany and its annexed territories. It was presented as an expression of public anger, but it was organised and directed by the Nazi leadership, with police instructed not to intervene against the perpetrators.

Kristallnacht exposed what happens when hatred is no longer merely spoken but is given permission to act. And even then, the persecution did not end. It intensified.

The Holocaust would ultimately result in the murder of six million Jewish people. The destruction of Jewish life in Europe was not accomplished in a single night. It was made possible by years of prejudice, propaganda, discriminatory legislation, intimidation, public indifference and the failure of people and institutions to defend their neighbours.

Her grandfather:

A life that history could have taken

For the Sister, Kristallnacht is not simply a chapter in a history book. It is connected to her own family, her heritage and the life of a grandfather she never had the opportunity to meet.

Her grandfather was a Hungarian Jew. By trade, he was a jeweller, and his work took him extensively across Europe to purchase silver and precious stones. He travelled frequently to Germany and spoke fluent German and French. Through his business, he had become familiar with different cultures, people and places.

But in 1933, he began experiencing the growing antisemitism and the laws and regulations being introduced against Jewish people. He recognised that something deeply disturbing was happening. He understood that the world around him was changing and that the future was becoming increasingly uncertain.

In the latter part of 1933, he made the decision to immigrate to England. He left behind much of his family in Hungary. It is difficult to imagine what went through his mind as he made that decision. What did it mean to leave his country, his family and the people he loved? Did he realise the full extent of what was coming? Did he carry a sense of foreboding that he could not fully explain?

He had the courage to leave when he recognised the warning signs. But he could not know what would eventually happen to those he left behind.

During the war, many members of his family were killed. His brother-in-law was taken to a concentration camp, where he died. His nephew was sent to a labour camp and later liberated from a concentration camp. The grandfather helped him reach England, where he was able to rebuild his life. That nephew went on to become a medical doctor and professor.

Think about that for a moment. A young man who had been imprisoned, stripped of his freedom and subjected to the horrors of the camps went on to dedicate his life to medicine and learning. His future, which could so easily have been extinguished, became a life of contribution and purpose.

Although the Sister never met her grandfather, she carries a deep sense of connection to him. Something of him lives within her, passed through the generations. His story is part of her story. His courage, his Jewish heritage and the suffering experienced by his family are part of the history that has shaped the generations that followed.

It is impossible to consider Kristallnacht without thinking about him: the family he left behind, the brother-in-law who never returned, the nephew who survived and the lives that were taken. There were futures that were never given the opportunity to unfold.

Behind every statistic was a human being: a grandfather, a mother, a father, a child, a brother or a sister. Someone with a name, a personality, a profession, a dream and people who loved them.

The Holocaust did not destroy numbers. It destroyed lives, families, communities, histories and generations. And it could have destroyed her grandfather's life too.

The most dangerous thing is not only hatred.

It is the silence that allows it to grow

One of the most confronting questions we must ask when remembering Kristallnacht is not simply, "How could the Nazis have done such things?"

We must also ask: "How did a society allow it to happen?"

How did ordinary people become accustomed to the exclusion of their Jewish neighbours? How did people watch businesses being destroyed and families being humiliated? How did religious institutions, community leaders and those with influence respond when their fellow human beings were being stripped of their rights?

There were people who resisted. There were courageous individuals who risked their own lives to protect and rescue Jewish people. We must honour them. But there were also many who remained silent, many who looked away, and some who actively participated.

History reminds us that evil does not always advance because everyone supports it. Sometimes it advances because enough people decide that opposing it is too uncomfortable, too inconvenient or too dangerous. Silence can become permission. Indifference can become complicity. Fear can become an excuse for abandoning what is right.

It is easy to condemn the past when we know how the story ended. It is much harder to recognise the warning signs while we are living through them. The people who witnessed the early stages of Nazi persecution did not know exactly what would happen next. But they could see that Jewish people were being targeted, excluded, humiliated and deprived of their rights. The Sister's grandfather saw enough to understand that he needed to leave. The question for us is whether we are paying attention to the warning signs of our own time.

Have we learnt anything?

We live in a world in which antisemitic language, attitudes and behaviour are once again deeply concerning. Jewish people are being targeted, threatened and intimidated in communities around the world.

Hatred is being expressed openly, sometimes disguised as political opinion, sometimes fuelled by conspiracy theories, and sometimes spread through social media with extraordinary speed.

We must be able to distinguish legitimate political debate from antisemitism. Criticism of the actions of a government is not automatically hatred of a people. But when Jewish people are collectively blamed, when Jewish identity becomes a reason for intimidation, when synagogues and Jewish institutions are targeted, and when Jewish communities are made to feel unsafe simply because they are Jewish, we must have the courage to call it what it is. Antisemitism must never be excused, minimised or selectively condemned.

Nor can we pretend that Australia is somehow immune.

The antisemitic terrorist attack at Bondi on 14 December 2025, and the subsequent establishment of a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, have made this reality impossible to ignore.

We cannot claim that we have learnt from history while allowing hatred to grow in our own streets, institutions, communities and conversations. The question is not whether we are living in exactly the same circumstances as 1933 or 1938. We are not. History does not need to repeat itself in precisely the same form for its warnings to be relevant.

Can humanity afford to repeat the mistakes of the past? Can we afford another generation of children growing up believing that their identity makes them unwelcome? Can we afford to watch people being targeted because of their ancestry, faith or heritage? Can we afford to wait until violence erupts before deciding that something should have been done? Surely, we cannot.

A challenge to Christians: Where will we stand?

For Christians, this question carries an even greater responsibility. Our faith is rooted in the Jewish people. Jesus was born a Jew. He lived as a Jew. His disciples were Jewish. The Scriptures that shaped His life and ministry were the Hebrew Scriptures. Our Christian faith is inseparably connected to the history, promises and purposes of God revealed through Israel.

The Apostle Paul gives Christians a solemn warning in Romans 11:18: "Do not boast against the branches." He reminds Gentile believers that they do not support the root; the root supports them.

How, then, can Christians claim to love Jesus while turning a blind eye to hatred directed towards the Jewish people? How can we speak of the love of God while remaining indifferent to the suffering of a people whose history is so deeply woven into our own faith? How can we sing about the faithfulness of God while failing to stand with those who are being persecuted?

Standing against antisemitism is not a political fashion or a matter of personal preference. It is a matter of moral conviction, biblical responsibility and the integrity of our Christian witness.

We must also recognise something deeply uncomfortable: Christians are not automatically immune to the forces that produce persecution. History has shown that religious identity can become a target when hatred, extremism and authoritarian power are allowed to take hold.

The same forces that seek to silence one community can eventually threaten the freedoms and consciences of others. The Holocaust was a genocide specifically directed against the Jewish people. Their suffering must be remembered in its own right. Yet the responsibility to resist the hatred that makes such persecution possible belongs to all of us.

The question that deserves to be put before Christians is this: The Jewish people have endured centuries of persecution, displacement and hatred, yet they have demonstrated extraordinary resilience. Can the same be said of us as Christians?

Not simply, can we endure hardship? But can we remain faithful when standing for what is right becomes costly? Can we speak when silence would be easier? Can we defend those who are being targeted even when their suffering is not popular to acknowledge? Can we refuse to participate in the dehumanisation of another human being?

Would we have recognised the warning signs in 1933? Would we have stood beside our Jewish neighbours in 1935 when their rights were stripped away? Would we have opened our doors in 1938 when their homes were attacked? Would we have spoken out when doing so carried a personal cost?

It is easy to say that we would have stood on the right side of history. It is much harder to prove that we are standing on the right side of it today.

Resilience is not enough.
Humanity must take responsibility.

The Jewish people are a people of remarkable resilience. Their history bears witness to survival in the face of extraordinary suffering. Their culture, faith, traditions and identity have endured despite repeated attempts throughout history to destroy them.

But Jewish people should never have been required to demonstrate such resilience. They should not have to prove their worth, defend their existence or justify their right to belong. That responsibility rests with the rest of humanity.

We must build societies in which people are not required to be courageous simply to live safely as themselves. We must teach our children that another person's heritage is not a threat, that difference is not a reason for contempt, and that no human being should be reduced to a stereotype or blamed for the actions of others.

We must also understand that hatred rarely remains confined to its original target. When a society accepts that one group can be dehumanised, it weakens the protection of every group. When truth is manipulated, prejudice is normalised and people are encouraged to fear their neighbours, the foundations of a just society begin to crumble.

This is why the fight against antisemitism matters to every one of us. It is not only a Jewish concern. It is a human concern.

Remembering must become a responsibility

As we remember Kristallnacht, the invitation is not simply to look backwards with sorrow. It is to look around us with discernment.

We must examine our own attitudes, conversations, churches and communities. Are we challenging antisemitism when we encounter it? Are we educating ourselves? Are we willing to stand alongside Jewish people, not merely in words but in meaningful action?

Are our churches places where Jewish people would know they are welcome and safe? Do we teach our young people the truth about the Holocaust? Are we willing to recognise hatred even when it comes from people with whom we otherwise agree?

We cannot condemn antisemitism selectively. We cannot oppose hatred only when it is expressed by those we disagree with. We cannot excuse it because it is wrapped in political slogans, religious language or nationalistic sentiment.

Hatred is still hatred. Dehumanisation is still dehumanisation. And silence is still silence.

The Sister's grandfather made a decision in 1933 that would change the course of his life and the lives of the generations that followed him. He recognised the danger and left. He survived, while many members of his family did not.

Although the past cannot be changed, his story can serve as a reminder of the responsibility carried by future generations. The lives that were taken cannot be restored, nor can the family gatherings that never took place. But their memory can be honoured by refusing to be silent when the attitudes that contributed to their suffering begin to emerge again.

The Sister carries something of her grandfather within her. Although she never had the privilege of meeting him, his story reminds us that history is never merely about people who lived long ago. It is about real lives, real families and the consequences of decisions made by individuals and societies.

The broken glass of Kristallnacht should never become just another photograph in a history book. It should remain a warning. A warning that hatred begins long before violence. A warning that discrimination is never harmless. A warning that words can prepare the way for actions. A warning that ordinary people can become accustomed to extraordinary cruelty. And a warning that we must never wait until the glass is broken before we decide to stand against hatred.

So, The Question Remains:
Have we learnt anything?

Will we be a generation that remembers but does nothing, or a generation that remembers and takes responsibility? Will Christians be found among those who remain silent, or among those who courageously stand for truth, justice, compassion and the dignity of every human being?

One family's story has become part of a legacy past through generations. What we do with the lessons of that generation will become part of the inheritance we leave to the next.

May we never have to explain to our children why we saw the warning signs and did nothing. May we never have to look back and ask ourselves why we remained silent.

And may we have the courage to stand today, before tomorrow becomes another chapter of history that future generations will struggle to understand.

"Never Again" must be more than a phrase we repeat when remembering the past. It must be a conviction that shapes how we live in the present

Thank you for your prayers, friendship and support.

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary

