



3029 NORTHEAST 188 STREET, SUITE 1114

AVENTURA, FLORIDA 33180

305/692-9991 FAX 305/692-8883 [www.targumshlishi.org](http://www.targumshlishi.org)

## ***Before It's Too Late: The Search for Mass Graves of Jews Massacred by Nazis in the Ukraine***

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*"It takes three whole days for a grave to die. For all that time, the ground doesn't stop moving because of the movements of the victims. The Germans, to save ammunition, buried people alive, especially children." –Father Patrick Desbois*

#### **What happened?**

During the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Nazi mobile killing units, *Einsatzgruppen*, followed the German army as it advanced deep into Soviet territory. The *Einsatzgruppen* went to the home communities of Jews, shot all Jewish men, women, and children without regard for age or sex, and buried them in mass graves. Many were buried alive to save Nazi bullets. By the spring of 1943, the *Einsatzgruppen* had killed 1.25 million Jews and buried them in an estimated 2,200 graves whose locations are largely unknown by Holocaust researchers.

The people who know the graves' locations are the eyewitnesses, Ukrainian villagers who were children and teenagers at the time.

#### **What's being done?**

Father Patrick Desbois is a French priest whose mission is to locate the sites of mass graves of Jewish victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* and collect testimonies that document what happened at each location in the Ukraine. He hopes to then move into Russia and the Baltics to continue the work.

Father Patrick Desbois and his team travel to the Ukraine every other month to interview witnesses, record their testimonies, and locate the graves. He and his team then locate, verify, and document the sites and collect ballistic evidence.

The originality of Father Desbois's work is that "he was the first to have the idea to talk to the Ukrainian witnesses – the bystanders," notes Edouard Husson, a historian at The Sorbonne.

#### **Who is Father Patrick Desbois?**

Father Patrick Desbois is a Catholic priest based in Paris. He is consultant to the Vatican on Relations with Judaism. He is also secretary of the Episcopal Committee for Relations with Jews of the French Bishops' Conference, a personal aide to Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, and acts as the adviser to the Cardinal of Lyon.



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In 2004 he founded the organization Yahad In Unum, whose mission is to further understanding and cooperation between Catholics and Jews. The work of identifying the sites of Jewish mass executions is the major focus of Yahad In Unum.

Father Desbois was born in Burgundy, France, in 1955 to a family deeply affected by the German occupation. His grandfather, like 25,000 other French soldiers, was held at Rawa Ruska internment camp in the Ukraine. Father Desbois is driven to do this work, he says, by “the desire to do a final kindness to the victims, those Jews who were murdered like mice all over Europe. In my view, they were done a double injustice, because they are still shrouded in darkness.”

### **Why the urgency?**

The answer is simple. The witnesses are old and are rapidly dying. History will die with them unless Father Desbois can reach them and record their testimonies.

Little is known about this terrible chapter in Jewish history. In the camps, there were survivors. The *Einsatzgruppen* wiped out whole villages in hours, entire regions in afternoons. There is little forensic or testimonial documentation other than what Father Desbois is collecting.

"Nobody was witness except those people I find. And they are very old. So we have to run to save the memory," explains Father Desbois.

### **What will my donation support?**

Your donation will support the work of Father Desbois.

To date (since 2004), Yahad In Unum has located over 500 graves in the western part of Ukraine. Some are small, while the largest contain tens of thousands of bodies. On each expedition, Father Desbois is accompanied by a team that includes a historian, a translator, a photographer, a recording technician, a ballistics expert, and a driver-bodyguard. While the historian estimates the number of bodies buried in the grave, based on its size and depth, the ballistics expert collects evidence left behind – to date, all shell casings found have been German, and from the 1941-43 time period, proof that the massacres were perpetrated by Nazis and countering claims that others were responsible and also proving beyond any doubt that the victims are indeed from the period of World War II.

Aside from the field workers, Father Desbois also has a team of Jewish, German, and Ukrainian students who conduct archival research. They track the extensive correspondence between the *Einsatzgruppen* companies and the main command in Berlin, which helps to connect names of places with killing sites so that Father Desbois can determine where to go.



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### **Why is my support needed?**

Father Desbois has been operating on an extremely limited budget throughout the life of this project. And every day, there is less time remaining to interview the eyewitnesses.

He has received support from The French Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah (chaired by Simone Veil) and his operating expenses are provided by the Catholic Church. His work has been authorized by the Lubavitcher rabbis of the Ukraine.

### **How will this information be shared in the future?**

Exhibitions, a book, and a documentary film are all in the planning stages. The Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation in Paris will use some of the artifacts in an exhibition. The French Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah plans to mount a traveling exhibition about the slaughter of the Jews in Eastern Europe. Father Desbois is at work on a book about the extermination of Ukrainian Jewry to be published by the Calmann Levy publishing house and plans are in the works to produce a documentary film about this period in history.

### **How can I help?**

Your support will enable Father Desbois and his team to continue his work. So far, Yahad In Unum has covered about a third of the area of the Ukraine. Father Desbois is confident that, with adequate funding, the job could be completed in another four years.

### **What is Targum Shlishi?**

Targum Shlishi, a Raquel and Aryeh Rubin Foundation, is a Miami-based philanthropic organization dedicated to providing a range of creative solutions to problems facing Jewry today. For more information on Targum Shlishi, visit our website at [www.targumshlishi.org](http://www.targumshlishi.org).

### **Why is Aryeh Rubin, director of Targum Shlishi, spearheading this fundraising effort?**

This is the first time we have spearheaded a fundraising effort. Father Desbois's work is of paramount importance. Victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* were massacred without dignity, sometimes buried alive, and we don't even know where. Our chance to finally document what happened is slipping away as the witnesses die. It is our duty to help preserve and disseminate history, put a halt to the desecration of the graves, and say *Kaddish* for the victims. It is a travesty that, 60-plus years after the massacres, this work has not been undertaken. It seems inconceivable that no Jewish organization has located the graves.

Targum Shlishi has donated \$50,000 to this effort as well as our time and resources in raising additional funds.



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**How do I donate funds?**

Contributions are by invitation. Please let Aryeh Rubin, director of Targum Shlishi, know you are contributing. All donation information is on the Contribute page included on the website. We also provide a cover letter that you can fill out or personalize.

**I'd like more information. Whom do I contact with questions?**

For more information about Yahad In Unum, visit their website at [www.yahadinunum.org](http://www.yahadinunum.org). For questions about donating funds or about Targum Shlishi, contact Andrea Gollin of Targum Shlishi: [andrea@targumshlishi.org](mailto:andrea@targumshlishi.org) or 305.733.4530.