

HOLOCAUST MEMORY KEEPER

CATHOLIC PRIEST, FATHER PATRICK DESBOIS SHARES POWERFUL EXPERIENCES WITH OVER 150 COMMUNITY LEADERS

More than 150 area leaders, prominent community members and educators gathered for a captivating evening featuring a discussion with **Father Patrick Desbois**, a world-renowned historian, human rights activist and Catholic priest. The evening was hosted by **Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County**, with generous support from an endowment established to honor, **Sidney and Dorothy Kohl** by their children **Lori Gendelman, Robert Kohl, Larry Kohl** and **Lisa Kohl** and their families held at the Norton Museum of Art.

Named “A Holocaust Memory Keeper” by *Wall Street Journal* and featured on *60 Minutes*, Desbois has devoted his life to collect testimonies of eyewitnesses and identify sites of mass crimes committed against European Jews and Roma by the Nazis and their collaborators during the *Holocaust by Bullets*. In addition, Father Desbois has and continues to document crimes against the Yazidis women at the hands of Isis, genocide in Guatemala and other countries.

Local Jewish community leader **Bruce Gendelman**, who spoke at the event, shared: “The tragedy of the Holocaust weighs heavily on me, as it does for most Jews. My maternal grandfather was the only one in his family to survive the ravages of the Holocaust in Ukraine. I kept it at arm’s distance until 2015 when I traveled there and saw exactly where my ancestors were murdered and heard the awful first person accounts myself. It was during that trip that I met Father Patrick Desbois; he is my hero and without a doubt, the most remarkable person I have ever met.”

The discussion was particularly poignant as the Russian invasion of Ukraine — home to more than 200,000 Jews — brings back traumatic memories of World War II, especially for the country’s large population of Holocaust survivors.

The Federation has established a *Ukraine Emergency Relief Fund*, so far raising nearly \$1,000,000 from more than 1,100 community members to support critical efforts on the ground through The Federation’s global partners.

The discussion also spotlighted how the mission of Desbois and his team has evolved to encompass the threat of modern-day genocide, discrimination and antisemitism. Palm Beach County educators were invited to the event, emphasizing the partnership between Federation’s **Jewish Community Relations Council** and with the **Palm Beach County School District** to ensure that public school students, faculty and administrators are receiving enhanced Holocaust education to curb the alarming rise in hate between different peoples, antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

Father Desbois is a Roman Catholic priest, scholar, researcher, human rights advocate, author and multi-award recipient, including the *Medal of Valor* by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the *Humanitarian Award* by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. His work has been widely recognized, including for his book *Holocaust by Bullets* (2008), which received the *National Jewish Book Award* in the United States. Father Desbois’ dedication has earned him the privilege of advisor to the Vatican on Catholic relations with Judaism, in addition he is a professor at Georgetown University.

As a young man Father Desbois, heard stories from his grandfather, who was a WWII French soldier held captive in a German camp in Rawa Ruska (Ukraine), Father Desbois’ unexpected encounters with eyewitnesses of the local 1943 massacre of Jews during a visit to Western Ukraine in 2003 was the starting point for his quest to find witnesses and document mass shootings of Jews and Roma.

For more information about Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County visit jewishpb.org.



FIRST ROW: Sidney and Dorothy Kohl with Father Patrick Desbois; Lori and Bruce Gendelman; **SECOND ROW:** Gene and Hope Silverman; Jerry and Barbara Pearlman; **THIRD ROW:** Paul and Sue Efron; Juliana Gendelman and Chris Goldberg; **FOURTH ROW:** Bob and Judy Snyder; Paul and Roberta Kozloff. PHOTOS: CAPEHART