

Steven D. Reece

To: Elaine Brown; John Mark Folker
Cc: Rachel McRae; Board
Subject: RE: the sign at the cemetery

Thank you all, for your feedback.

Identity is fluid and it is not always set in terms that fits our understanding. People perceive us differently even when we use “our words” to describe, who we are.

From our perspective it makes better sense from an American context to drop any reference to Baptist and just say, “We are American Christians.” However, by identifying ourselves as Baptist-Christians from a Polish and Jewish perspective makes a strong distinction and a different statement of who we are as Christians. We are not Roman Catholic “Christians,” which in Poland is how the majority of people understand Christianity. I think that it is interesting that Tomek and the AJC described us in this way as Baptist-Christians because it points to the distinction that we are not Catholic without saying it or making that distinction. To say that we are a Christian organization in the Polish context means that we are somehow linked, in the minds of the majority of Poles, to the Catholic church, even if we are Americans. This is the mindset of most Poles. Evangelical Christians comprise less than one percent of the total population today in Poland.

Secondly, from a Polish-Jewish perspective, the Jewish community of Poland understands Christianity from their experience with Christianity in the form of the Catholic church. When I first began interacting with Aleks for example, it took him a while to see the difference between us as Baptist Christians and the Catholic Christians with whom he and the Jewish community of Poland interacted. He pointed out that generally, when the Catholic church did anything for the Jewish community it was done patronistically and that the Jewish community should be grateful for whatever the Catholic church did for them. My attitude was and still is that I wish to serve the Jewish community and that I am thankful for the opportunity to do so—no matter what I am asked to do.

Thirdly, for these reasons from the very beginning of my interaction with the Jewish community, I emphasized that I represented the Baptist Christian Church of Poland. I was an official representative and associate of the Baptist Union of Poland, which in Polish is known as the Baptist-Christian Church of Poland. It made sense to continue this reference moving forward in our work as TMF in our interaction with the Jewish community of Poland and with Poles in general, because this is how I was known.

Lastly, I also learned a great lesson in Kosovo, when we served there following the war. The Kosovar, Muslim Albanians were persecuted and murdered by their Orthodox Christian neighbors. For them all Christians were Orthodox. We chose to identify ourselves as Baptists. A Muslim in Kosovo had never seen a Baptist and in their experience Christians hated them. As Baptists we shared with them the love of Christ through serving them. For them it was a stark contrast to their experience.

I realize that from our cultural perspective this terminology may seem unnecessary; however, it is vitally important and leads at times to spiritual discussions. For example, Haim remarked to me recently how surprised he was that I thanked him for allowing me to assist him in his journey. I was also asked to explain how I learned to speak Polish during the meeting that Haim and I had with the mayor of Chrzanów. I explained that I lived and worked in Poland with the Baptist Church of Poland. Finally, on my last Sunday in Poland, I was invited to Agnieszka’s home for their Easter celebration. Agnieszka is not Jewish and her family is staunchly Roman Catholic. Her husband, Darek, privately asked me to explain who I was as a Baptist and what we believed.

I hope that my explanation is clear for using the term Baptist in the Polish context. It sometimes makes a difference here in the US, but I think for the most part in the US we can focus on being American Christians. The main thing to keep in mind that we are a puzzle for many people. We are Christians working in Jewish cemeteries in Poland. That will never change; however, the terminology that we use to describe ourselves to others is not always fixed and must speak to their cultural understanding of who we are as Christians.

Thank you,

Steven

From: Elaine Brown <elaine.brown@matzevah.org>

Sent: Monday, April 9, 2018 14:05

To: John Mark Folker <jmfolker@matzevah.org>

Cc: Rachel McRae <rachel.mcrae@matzevah.org>; Steven Reece <sdreece@matzevah.org>; Board <board@matzevah.org>

Subject: Re: the sign at the cemetery

I agree and do like American Christian better. Also, should there be a hyphen between Christian and Jewish "...involved in Christian-Jewish dialogue..." ?

On Mon, Apr 9, 2018 at 11:57 AM, John Mark Folker <jmfolker@matzevah.org> wrote:

I was wondering the same... what if we changed it to American Christian nonprofit organization??

John Mark Folker



John Mark Folker

Director of Operations, The Matzevah Foundation, Inc.

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On Apr 9, 2018, at 10:28 AM, Rachel McRae <rachel.mcrae@matzevah.org> wrote:

My initial reading of it was fine to me. But then I started to get hung up on "Baptist." Do we want to specifically call that out?

I have attached files of our logo should you need. First 2 are the same but are different sizes. The last one is our social media image. The long one is our official logo so it would be best if that one is used for the marker. However, if room on the marker doesn't allow for it then the square one could be an option.

On Mon, Apr 9, 2018 at 7:26 AM, Steven D. Reece <sdreece@matzevah.org> wrote:

FYI. Please read and review. Provide any comments or changes by Wednesday afternoon.

Thank you,

Steven

From: tomek.kuncewicz@gmail.com <tomek.kuncewicz@gmail.com> **On Behalf Of** Tomasz Kuncewicz
Sent: Monday, April 9, 2018 07:44
To: Steven Reece <sdreece@matzevah.org>
Subject: the sign at the cemetery

Dear Steven,

I hope all is well. It was good seeing you in Oswiecim. Please have a look at the proposed text for the sign. We would also need your logo.

Od 2012 r. w opiece i utrzymaniu cmentarza żydowskiego w Oświęcimiu bierze udział Matzevah Foundation, amerykańska organizacja chrześcijan-baptystów, która pracuje na rzecz dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego poprzez utrzymanie cmentarzy żydowskich w Polsce oraz nauczanie o Zagładzie.

Since 2012 the Matzevah Foundation has been participating in the maintenance and upkeep of the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. The Matzevah Foundation is an American Baptist organization involved in Christian Jewish dialogue through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland and teaching about the Holocaust.

Please make any edits you deem necessary.

best regards, Tomek

--

Tomasz Kuncewicz
Dyrektor | Director

www.ajcf.pl



Rachel McRae

Director of Communications

www.matzevah.org



<Adjusted Logo.jpg>

<TMF Logo 2017.jpg>

<TMF Social Logo.JPG>



E. Elaine Brown

Director of Development

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