

Steven D. Reece

From: The Matzevah Foundation <sdreece@matzevah.org>
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2019 Year End Report

As we embark on a new year, we wanted to share with you a review of our work from 2019. The Matzevah Foundation (TMF), in our ninth year of existence, continues to see growth with each passing year. That growth comes in a variety of forms from the number of projects we conduct in Poland to the number of volunteers who give of their time and resources to the growing impact that TMF has not just in Poland but around the world. While our most visible activity occurs during the summer with our cemetery restoration and commemoration projects, our team works each month to further the scope of our work.

We are excited to share with you a snapshot of our work from this past year!

From Our President



Humble Beginnings: Our First Nine Years The Growth and Development of TMF

In the fall of 2010, I was living in the U.S., considering how I could advance the work that I began in Poland in 2004. At that time, I was a Baptist minister working with Baptist Poles. I had a crazy idea to work with the Jewish community to care for and restore a Jewish cemetery in Poland with Polish and American Christians. With the blessing of the Chief Rabbi of Poland, we began our work in 2005 and by 2008 we had worked in six Jewish cemeteries in the Warsaw area. At the end of 2008, my family and I returned from Poland to live in the U.S. By 2010, I began to consider what it would look like if I started a non-profit to continue our work. Along with a group of Christian friends, we established The Matzevah Foundation (TMF), as a 501(C)(3) in December 2010.

We began our first project in Zambrow, Poland in August 2012 in

cooperation with two partners, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland and the Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries in Poland. Since then our work has grown and diversified to the point that this summer (2020), we will carry out eleven projects scattered across Poland in cooperation with ten Jewish organizations and one non-Jewish organization involving local governments and community organizations including numerous volunteers.

To organize and coordinate such work requires time and leadership. There are seven board members and three volunteers, who guide, direct, and execute the work of TMF. Our work is cyclical and divided into three primary cycles: gathering and planning potential projects, project development, and project implementation. In the first phase, we consider current work, project inquiries, and partnership commitments. Phase two centers on project development with partners and includes developing a budget and volunteer recruitment. Finally, we go to the field and work with our partners, friends, communities, and local and international volunteers to care for Polish-Jewish cemeteries

You might wonder why do we do such work? We seek to honor and preserve the Jewish heritage of Poland. We do this work by caring for and restoring the Jewish cemeteries of Poland and thereby open dialogue and pursue reconciliation between Jews and Christians. The restoration work that we do is not merely about restoring or redeeming physical spaces, or their status within a particular community, but it is more so about restoring and redeeming broken relationships between people.

- Steven D. Reece, President of The Matzevah Foundation



Winter

- The early part of the year was spent setting our schedule of projects in Poland for the summer and communicating with our various partners

Spring

- Our spring board meeting was held in Franklin, Tennessee. The team gave final approval on our summer projects and each board member provided an update from their respective areas of responsibility.
- In April, Steven Reece, president of TMF, was a keynote speaker at the 7th Annual Genocide Awareness Week hosted by Scottsdale Community College in Scottsdale, Arizona. The topic of his talk was “The Shoah and Its Aftermath: Speaking for Those Who Have No Voice Today”.





Summer

- We launched a new website in early June. The new matzevah.org contains information on the history of our organization, information on cemetery restorations, volunteer resources, news articles, and more.
- A full summer of projects in Poland begins!
 - **Częstochowa:** TMF partnered with Alon Goldman with [The World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants](#) and with the Christian Foundation Adullam ([Fundacja Adullam](#)) of Częstochowa for a week of work. We were blessed to have more than 200 local students come out in a Polish heat wave. With their help we were able to clean and clear large sections of this important cemetery.
 - **Krzepice:** In mid June we returned to Krzepice where we worked with a group of students with the Future Scholars Fellowship Program and [JewishGen](#), TMF volunteers, and local high school

students. Overgrowth of trees, grass, and bushes were cut down and hauled away.

- **Krośniewice:** President Steven Reece joined descendant, Joel Rosenkranz, whose father fled the community before the liquidation of the ghetto in 1942 to work in the local cemetery. Together they cleared about 25% of this cemetery that is under the care of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ).
- **Oświęcim:** In August we returned to Oświęcim with a full team of TMF board members, volunteers from TN and NJ and a handful of local volunteers. With assistance from the Auschwitz Jewish Center and The International Youth Meeting Center we were able to complete a full cleaning and clearing of the cemetery. Extra attention was given to the front of the cemetery so that those who visit will be greeted with a peaceful and beautiful first impression.
- **Przerośl:** Together with a group of descendants of Przerośl, we continued clearing the Jewish cemetery in the northeast corner of Poland. A lot of progress was made in this, our third year, here and we are well on our way to finishing a complete cleaning in 2020. We continue to enjoy our friendship with this wonderful group of descendants.

For a full recap of each project, we invite you to visit our [website](#).



Fall

- Our fall board meeting was held in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. A complete review of our 2019 projects was conducted and initial plans for 2020 were laid out. Steven Reece also presented a summary of his dissertation that he successfully defended earlier in the summer.
- November held two film screening events in Atlanta and Nashville where we showed *The Presence of Their Absence*. Both events allowed us the opportunity to meet new people who were interested in our work. We're grateful for The Temple in Atlanta and the Nashville Jewish Film Festival who supported these events.
- Our annual Giving Tuesday campaign was a huge success! We had a goal to raise \$3,000 in one day. The results? We raised \$3,658... thank you!
- We celebrated nine years as an organization on December 10

matzevah.org

THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION
REMEMBERING RESTORING RECONCILING

FUN STATS FROM 2019

- **310:** Number of summer volunteers
- **1,500:** Number of miles driven in Poland
- **9:** Number of years of TMF
- **30:** Number of projects completed by TMF since our beginning
- **1,310:** Total number of volunteers since our beginning
- **Undisclosed:** Number of pounds of pierogi eaten at the Krakow Pierogi Festival in August

Coming in 2020

- Announcement of TMF's summer 2020 cemetery restoration and commemoration projects coming in late March to early April

- In May, President Steven Reece will graduate from Andrews University with his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in leadership. His dissertation is titled *The Third Space: The Meeting of Jew and Christian in the Act of Remembering, Restoring, and Reconciling - A Case Study of the Matzevah Foundation*. You may download and read his dissertation at the [Digital Commons @ Andrews University](#).

Administration

The Matzevah Foundation operates as a tax-exempt 501(C)(3) non-profit corporation recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a public charity. Our board is made up of the following team members:

Steven D. Reece – Founder and President of The Matzevah Foundation

Kevin Little – Treasurer

JoAnn Siegienski – Secretary

Elaine Brown – Director of Development

John Mark Folker – Director of Operations in the U.S.

Rachel McRae – Director of Communications

Przemek Panisuk – Director of Operations in Poland

We also have a dedicated team of volunteer staff that support the efforts of our organization in a variety of ways.



Financial

Our cemetery restoration and commemoration projects for 2019 were fully funded through donations from private individuals and organizations. We are grateful to those who faithfully give each month and throughout the year. All donations we receive support not only our projects in Poland but also administration and operational needs.

We receive countless hours of volunteer work from our board, volunteer staff, and project volunteers. There are many people who give of their time, talents, and finances to help further the work of The Matzevah Foundation. We cannot put a value on all the many ways people give to our work... we are extremely grateful!

There are a couple of ways you can be a part of our work in Poland:

Volunteer: We will be announcing our project schedule for the summer of 2020 by April. We invite you to submit a volunteer application and join us for one of the projects this year. Learn more [here](#).

Financial Giving: As our organization grows in scope and impact, so do our needs for funding. We can not do this important work in Poland without

financial gifts from you. Will consider one partnering with us in 2020?

Become a Monthly Donor

Set up a recurring monthly donation through PayPal and make an easy donation each month. Choose amounts of \$25, \$50, \$100 or more to give each month. Visit [our website](#) for a link to our PayPal today!

Or you can give monthly by writing a check made payable to The Matzevah Foundation and mail to:

The Matzevah Foundation
2020 Fieldstone Pkwy, Suite 900-246
Franklin, TN 37069

The Board of Directors, along with President Steven Reece, sincerely thank you for your engagement, investment, and support of our work in 2019. We look forward to sharing more stories and more progress in our work in 2020.



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The Matzevah Foundation
2020 Fieldstone Pkwy, Suite 900-246
Franklin, TN 37069

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