



Museum of Memory, Assisi 1943-1944 Exhibition

WELCOME

The Museum of Memory is a reproduction of a permanent museum in Assisi with exhibits showing the Italian city of Assisi's role in saving 300 of their Jewish neighbors from the Nazis.

What follows is a description of each of the large panels in the order in which they are meant to be studied. The smaller posters you see on easels highlight certain parts of the main panels, enabling you to get a better look at some of the most important documents and images.

PANELS

1: I RIFUGIATI EBREI IN ASSISI / INTRODUCTION 1943-1944

This introductory panel covers the years 1943-1944, highlighting September 8, 1944, Day of Amnesty, when 4,000 Jews arrived in Assisi. The panel illustrates the realities of how Italy was split into two during the latter part of World War II, with the northern section being a fascist republic. Depiction of the history and geography of Italy at the time when Italy was split in two.

2: BRUNACCI

Don Aldo Brunacci was the Secretary to Bishop Nicolini (more in Panel 3) who organized a committee to take care of Jews seeking refuge, which Pope Pius XII asked for in a letter sent to Bishop Nicolini. Brunacci was arrested because of this dangerous work. Photos depict Brunacci planting a tree in Jerusalem and at the US House of Representatives and with 2 Jewish survivors. Also shown is a letter he received from Steven Spielberg, and a photo of Bishop Nicolini.

3: NICOLINI

Bishop Nicolini took on the initiative to welcome the Jews into Assisi at the request of Pope Pius XII. Bishop Nicolini was Bishop of Assisi for over 50 years and was a fatherly figure who was greatly loved. He took the great risk of hiding the Jews and their precious documents. Pre-war photo from 1938 shows Bishop Nicolini with famous Italian cyclist Gino Bartali.

4: GINO BARTALI

Gino Bartali was a famous cyclist and a great man of faith, who was given a private chapel by the Cardinal of Florence, Elia Dalla Costa. Bartali was asked to pedal for salvation by riding between Assisi and Florence carrying forged documents in the pipes of his bicycle. Photos show Cardinal Dalla Costa and Bishop Nicolini with Gino Bartali at his chapel.

5: TRENTO BRIZI

Father and son Luigi and Trento Brizi owned a printing press, which they used to create documents to hide the true identities of the Jews in Assisi. They printed these documents during the day at great risk to themselves and their families. In 1997, Yad Vashem honored the Brizis for risking their lives to save Jews in Assisi.



6: MONASTERI

Within Assisi, the first stop for many Jews and other refugees was the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, where the friars were able to protect and save many who were looking to escape the Nazis. One photo shows a piece of parchment signed by those helped by Brother Michael Todd.

General Minister of the Friars, Father Bede Hess, from America, played an important role in allowing Assisi to be named a Hospital City. This was very significant in that it meant that Assisi was saved from the Nazi bomb attacks.

Cloistered convents San Quirico, Santa Croce, and Santa Colette formed clandestine religious communities where Jews could be hidden and given refuge. Bishop Nicolini asked the superiors of the convents to take in the Jews because no one could get into the convents. There were at least three unsuccessful attempts by Nazis trying to enter San Quirico. San Damiano Convent was one of the most famous convents where Jews were hidden.

7: FORTINI / MULLER

Mayor Arnaldo Fortini, a Fascist, and Captain Valentin Muller, the Catholic commanding officer of the German troops in Assisi, were both honored in Assisi for their roles in protecting the Jews and the identities of their families. For these efforts, Fortini was arrested and later released. A street plaque was named after Muller to honor him for his work.

8: TESTIMONIANZE

This panel shows a testimonial from a Croatian family who were saved by these efforts in Assisi. Photos show a Jewish family who escaped by changing their names and moving to another city using fake identities. In 2004, then Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi gave the entire city of Assisi the gold medal for these actions.

THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DURING THE HOLOCAUST

The Catholic Church played a significant role in saving lives during the Holocaust, which is often overlooked. When visiting the Museum of Memory exhibit, and watching the accompanying video, it's important to note that Assisi is just one of many cities, villages, and ecclesiastical facilities worldwide that intervened in the face of life-threatening danger to protect Jewish people during the Holocaust. Israeli historian and diplomat Pinchas E. Lapide, who lived through WWII and had firsthand knowledge of the life-saving efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, compiled the data below showing the number of lives saved in each European country. Under the pontificate of Pope Pius XII, the Catholic Church saved between 847,000 and 882,000 Jews, which resulted in 25% of the entire world's Jewish population of 16.1 million today. Note that this was 2/10 of 1% of the world's population at that time.

France:	200,000	Romania:	250,000	Poland:	15,000–50,000
Belgium	65,000	Balkans:	12,000	Netherlands:	25,000
Hungary	200,000	Italy:	55,000	Slovakia:	25,000
Total:	847,000–882,000				