The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas
Meeting Guide for Youth & Church Groups

INTRODUCTION
This meeting guide is designed to help church groups to explore the themes of the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in a faith-centred context. It is suitable for use in small groups, youth groups, and other related contexts. The guide will work best when adapted for your individual group, so feel free to edit and adjust all material for your own needs. To help you in this, there is a 'suggested reading' section below. This guide is designed as a follow up resource for groups who have already viewed the film.

BACKGROUND PREPARATION
You may wish to look at some of the book or website resources listed at the foot of this guide. For the suggested activities, you will need: a range of children's toys and games; large sheets of paper; pens; chocolate prizes; a copy of the fairy tale: *Red Riding Hood*.

MEETING AIM
This meeting guide explores some of the themes raised by the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. It ends by looking at a Christian response to the Jewish Holocaust, but it begins, like the film, by exploring childhood innocence. The key aim is to encourage Christians to see the Holocaust as part of the story of God and his people, and not simply as a historical tragedy.

WHEN WE WERE SMALL (15 minutes)
Before the group enters your venue, set out some games and activities which are suitable for much younger children. Play Doh, children's board games, dolls and action figures would all be suitable, but make sure you choose items which are tactile; which people will enjoy picking up, holding and playing with. If possible, choose items which they might have played with when they were a little younger. You may wish to go even further in evoking childhood memories, by the way in which you decorate the space, or by playing childish music in the background. You could even serve them jelly and ice cream!

When your group enters, invite them to pick up and play with some of the toys. Encourage them to play one of the games, and allow enough time for them to really get involved in the activity. When you feel like they've had some fun, explain that today, you're trying to help them rediscover a little childhood innocence. As they continue to sit among the toys and games, ask them to discuss one of all of the following questions with the three or four people sitting nearest to them:

- When you were small, what do you remember about your favourite toys and games?
- What were your dreams? What did you want to do when you grew up?
- Who were your heroes when you were small?

Encourage them to feed back their best / most embarrassing answers to the group.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? (10 minutes)
Still in their groups, encourage them to think back to when they viewed *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.* Using large sheets of paper, get them to sketch out a timeline of the events of the film – describing what happens when. Get them to record as many plot details as they can remember on the sheet and award a small chocolate prize to the group which records the most (accurate) information.

Now, ask the same groups to consider what they think are the <u>themes</u> of the film? What messages was it trying to communicate (there are definitely multiple answers to this question)? Finally, ask them to consider what they think was the key theme and message of the film. Allow a debate to take place among the group on this subject, if one arises.

PERSPECTIVES (15 minutes)
Returning to the 'childhood' theme, encourage the group to sit comfortably while you tell a fairy story. Our suggestion is that you use *Little Red Riding Hood*, but if you follow the same guidelines, you should be able to use most stories for the same purpose. Read the story, making sure you make reference to several of the minor, seemingly less significant characters – in this case, the grandmother and the woodcutter.

Now, when you read the story, the main action revolves around the girl and the wolf. But what if the story were told from the perspective of Grandmother? Then it's a story about a wolf, breaking in and locking you in a closet while a girl's life is threatened on the other side of the door.

Get the groups to imagine new versions of the same events, told from the perspective of one of the minor characters. They can read their stories to the group, or perform dramatic versions. Encourage them to use artistic flamboyance, and award chocolate prizes to everyone who takes part.

When they have finished reflecting, ask them: what did it do to the story when you changed the perspective? How did you feel about that familiar story? What new insights did you discover about it?

Explain that although *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* at first appears to be about young childhood, it isn't specifically a 'children's story'; its message is relevant to everyone. What the film does is show a familiar historical event through completely different eyes – the eyes of an innocent child living with a father who is committing unspeakable activities.

The Holocaust is perhaps the most horrific and evil crime ever perpetrated by man. Yet sometimes, it can be seen simply as a terrible chapter in our history, and we can be guilty of forgetting about it. This is especially true in the church, which can often view it as being part of Jewish history, and not our own. But is that right? And should we simply see the Holocaust as an awful historical story?

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE (10 minutes)
Give out the following verses (and Bibles if necessary), one to each group:

Deuteronomy 7 v 6-8
Jeremiah 31 v 35-40
Romans 11 v 1-2

In each case ask the groups to consider and discuss:

- What does this teach us about God's relationship with the Jewish people?
- How should that impact how we view the Jewish people, both historically and today?
- What do you find interesting or difficult in these verses.

Encourage the groups to feed back into the wider group as you close the session.

CONCLUSION: ONE FAMILY (5 minutes)
The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas offers a new perspective into familiar and terrible events, and helps us to realise again the scale of the terrible atrocities committed during the Holocaust. Previously we may have seen this as someone else's story, yet if we are Christians, we have discovered that we are part of the same family – and we too must never allow this tragedy to be forgotten. As you finish, encourage the group to ask God what he is saying to them through this film. How does He want us to respond? Through becoming a peacemaker? Through building relationships with the local Jewish community? Remind the group that God can speak through many things and not always on the topic that we expect! Allow a time of silence for people to pray, and then end the session by playing some quiet music.

SUGGESTED READING

- **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas** by John Boyne – the film's source novel contains some significant plot differences, but addresses the same themes.
- **The Diary of a Young Girl** by Anne Frank – the legendary diary of a Jewish teenager forced into hiding by the Nazi's in the latter part of World War Two.
- **The Holocaust** by Martin Gilbert – authoritative and thorough history book, containing the stories and voices of many of the individuals involved.

SUGGESTED WEBLINKS

- **http://www.yadvashem.org/ -** Yad Vashem is the Jewish people's memorial to the estimated six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Their site includes an in-development database containing the names of all those known to have perished, plus a number of educational resources.
- **http://www.ushmm.org/ -** The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website includes dedicated section on genocide, and is most useful for its extensive Holocaust Encyclopaedia.