

On Tuesday, 29th January, I was lucky enough to be invited to attend a Holocaust conference at Northwood Synagogue.

When our group from St Mary's arrived, the staff and helpers were all incredibly friendly and welcoming and led us through to the main hall. A few brief introductions gave us some background information about the Holocaust with some shocking statistics. Stephen Frank, the guest speaker and Holocaust survivor, took to the stage in a humble fashion that perhaps set the tone for the sad story that he was to tell.

Interrupting his words with photos of his family and their journey was a beautiful touch; the audience was fixated as Mr Frank told the harrowing story of his happy childhood which changed forever when Hitler came to power. Keeping his emotions in check showed great bravery and perhaps illustrated how much this man had overcome. When Mr Frank spoke about how his father was taken, tortured and sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz, I am not ashamed to admit that a tear came to my eye. But he calmly continued; not showing a lack of compassion, but that the wounds had perhaps healed slightly with time.

Although his speech was unfortunately cut short, we were taken to workshops where we discussed what his story had taught us. I think all of us were moved and inspired by his sad but courageous tale and understand that it is important that such an atrocity is not allowed to happen again, or that we take action to stop those which are happening. We watched a video back in the main hall about other groups of people who have/are being discriminated against even now. Finally, to end the day, we attended a reflection during which we all lit a candle and Holocaust poetry was read. It was a fitting end to what had not been a morbid day, but one of understanding and inspiration. I think I will take away Mr Frank's message about how we must stand up for those facing discrimination for we should have learnt from past mistakes and know that it is unacceptable in any form.

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Year 10