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Charitable activities of Częstochowa Church in the years 1945–1950

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Abstract: In September 1945, the first parish Caritas branches started to operate in the Diocese of Częstochowa. Over time, this structure considerably expanded, and in 1947 the Caritas District in Sosnowiec emerged, but a year later the Caritas District in Częstochowa was established. This resulted in better coordination of charitable activities in the two largest urban centers in the Diocese of Częstochowa. Church authorities had great confidence in the board of the Caritas Association of the Diocese of Częstochowa, which regularly received support. The person who deserved special attention was Miron Kolakowski, who, almost all the time, held the position of president of the association. Next to him, Fr. Edward Banaszkiewicz and Fr. Władysław Pająk were also considered leading figures. Initially, the state authorities granted substantial financial support to the Church of Częstochowa for running a charity, but later withdrew their support, and they finally brought the church charity to liquidation.

Key words: the church of Częstochowa, the state authorities, charity, welfare, support.

Organizational structures

Soon after the war had ended, a report was prepared on charitable activities of the Diocese of Częstochowa during the Nazi occupation. On November 25, 1945

Bishop of Częstochowa, Teodor Kubina, dismissed a former diocesan director of Caritas, Fr. Władysław Pająk, and his position was taken over by Fr. Edward Banaszkiwicz. A little earlier, in September this year, first parish Caritas branches began to be active, and by the end of 1945, 83 branches operated in the area of the diocese. These activities did not satisfy the diocesan authorities, so on January 29, 1946 at the meeting of the clergy, it was decided that a Caritas branch should be established in every parish. For better coordination of all charity work in the diocese, parish branches were to work in the future within five Caritas districts. This commitment of church to those in need had firm approval of the state authorities. It was also important that there was support of foreign charities such as: War Relief Services, National Catholic Welfare Conference and American Relief for Poland.

On October 31, 1946, the Social and Political Department of the Regional Office in Kielce informed the board of the Association that by decision of the Governor of Kieleckie province, on October 15 this year, the Caritas Association of the Diocese of Częstochowa in Częstochowa was entered in the Register of Associations and Unions of Kieleckie province. On November 18, 1946, the protector of the Diocesan Caritas, Bishop T. Kubina made an inspection of the offices and warehouses of the institution. It should be noted that within the structures of Caritas, there was a special section called Caritas Academica, whose task was to care for young students of Częstochowa. At that time, the Diocesan Caritas had already 133 parish branches and 1810 parish board members. An important factor was the recruitment of new staff to the charity. For this purpose, dozens of courses were organized, attended by several hundred people. It was important to inform people about the activities of Caritas, which was done by means of a special magazine "Caritas of the Diocese of Częstochowa", whose editor was Fr. Edward Banaszkiwicz. In 1947, the number of parish Caritas branches increased to 163, and they were divided into 853 regions. The organization had 4295 active members and the number of supporting members amounted to 17,169 people. There were 11 courses organized for new members, which were attended by 444 people. Moreover, to facilitate their charitable activities, on November 9, 1947 the Caritas District in Sosnowiec was founded, which included parish branches of the Deanery of Sosnowiec. Fr. Stefan Babczyński was appointed the director of the newly established district.

The organizational structure of Caritas of Częstochowa was not satisfactory, as during the General Assembly on April 4, 1948, there were new changes postulated in this respect. The delegates from Dąbrowa Górnicza proposed

establishing a new Caritas district in their town, or joining Dąbrowa Górnicza deanery parish branches to a nearby district in Sosnowiec. They were not the only proposals for the reorganization of the administrative-territorial structures of the organization, as there were also suggestions for establishing districts in Częstochowa, Wieluń and Zagłębie. Unfortunately, on November 7, 1948 only the Caritas district in Czestochowa was founded, which included parish branches of Czestochowa deanery. At the same time that year, seven new parish branches were established. There were 2571 organization members and 36369 supporting members. The third General Assembly which took place at Jasna Góra on May 8, 1849 appeared to be important. The meeting was attended by 208 members of the parish branches. Miron Kołakowski resigned from the position of Diocesan Chairman of Caritas, and his position was taken over by Fr. W. Pająk. Also, new board members were elected for the next term of office.

At the beginning of 1950, the situation of Caritas in Poland changed, which was due to the deterioration of state-church relations. On January 23 the same year, the Militia took over all Caritas agencies and they came under the control of appointed administrators. This fact provoked an immediate response of Polish hierarchs who, on January 30, 1950, issued “The letter of the Polish bishops to the clergy regarding Caritas”. On the same day, “An Episcopal Statement to the faithful regarding Caritas” was issued. According to the above documents “as soon as the state authorities established control of Caritas, the organization ceased to be an expression of social and charitable work of Church [...] as a result of this, the bishops faced an unpleasant necessity to liquidate a charitable church institution called Caritas”. At the same time the state authorities appointed the board of administrators of Caritas in the Diocese of Czestochowa. Its composition was published on January 27, 1950. Having a sense of responsibility, the protector of the diocesan Caritas decided to liquidate it. For this purpose, on February 1, 1950, he set up the Liquidation Committee that transferred the property of diocesan Caritas to the Diocesan Curia in Czestochowa. Consequently, the properties in the possession of Caritas parish branches were transferred to individual parish churches. Simultaneously, a letter to the Governor of Kielckie province was sent, informing them about the liquidation of the church Caritas in Czestochowa on February 1, 1950. Since that time, the charity has been incorporated into the parish chaplaincy.

Charity

An important element of charity work, after the war had ended, was to re-establish the parish branches of Caritas in the Diocese of Częstochowa. The board of the parish branch consisted of the president, the office manager, the secretary and the treasurer. Home addresses of board members and the address of premises, which housed a branch office, were to be entered in the application form. Having completed this procedure, the branch was to be registered with the Diocesan Caritas Association in Częstochowa and with state administrative bodies. In spite of some initial problems, parish branches, organized later, functioned normally. It was testified by the report on the first year of Caritas activities. At the end of 1945, 6480 people benefited from the generosity of the faithful, and the amount of granted benefits exceeded 666 thousand zł. At that time, 9724 kg of food, 8400 kg of coal, and 368 items of clothing were distributed among the poor. It should also be noted that in December, that year, Caritas opened free eating places in Częstochowa and Wieluń, an orphanage in Wieluń and a kindergarten in Rozprza. The Caritas Academica granted scholarships amounting to 45 thousand zł. All of this was appreciated by local authorities which allocated 300 thousand zł for these purposes from the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. There was also a significant financial help received from American Catholics united in various church organizations and from Polish War Relief.

In the second half of 1946, the aid offered to the needy increased. There was a greater number of free eating places, used by approximately 3.5 thousand people every day, and 653,226 meals were given out throughout the year. This was not the only help. Significant poverty of workers and their families resulted in the fact that there were summer holiday camps organized, and a school lunch help was initiated during the school year. Some children required full-time care, which was offered to them in children's homes run by Caritas. In 1946 there were 623 children in these orphanages. Particular care was offered by an orphanage in Wieluń, which housed 35 orphans. There were also homes for the elderly who needed constant care. All the activities were greatly supported by foreign aid, which by the end of 1946, was provided by different organizations. Among them, there was War Relief Services N.C.W.C. called American Caritas. Both of the above mentioned organizations purchased a truck for the purpose of Caritas in Częstochowa. Significant help was also provided by The Holy See, and UNRRA providing more than four thousand garments and 10.5 thousand kg of food. All the charity was also supported by education authorities and local governments.

Considerable funds were also collected from donations, from which food and clothing were purchased. Medical care was also financed and necessary drugs for patients were paid for. In reference to this problem, the Association authorities appealed to shop owners, who, in 1946, gave support to the poor through Caritas with almost 175 thousand zł. With the money received, each begging person could have dinner and packed lunch every day.

The next year there were 24 eating places for the poor working at parish branches. 6.5 million zł was spent on feeding the poor. A large amount of clothing, footwear, household and cleaning products were distributed estimated at 24 million zł. Thanks to Caritas, summer holidays for 807 children from poor families were successfully organized. The total cost of the summer camps equaled 5,000,000 zł, from which 1.5 million zł was paid by county camp committees at school inspectorates. Day camps were organized on a smaller scale, attended by 251 children, and the overall cost of their organization amounted to 988 thousand zł, from which the sum of 319 thousand zł was paid by county committees. The action, carried out for the first time in the diocese, of putting up children from families living in urban areas with rural families produced a positive effect and was benefited by 124 children. Caritas Academica organized street fund raising thanks to which 122 thousand zł was collected, while 48 thousand zł was obtained from artistic activities. Thanks to these funds, 60 scholarships were granted to the poorest university students.

The number of people in need and donors, at the same time, increased the next year. Owing to this, there were eating places working as before, giving out free meals in dozens of parishes. A students' canteen in Częstochowa was also organized this year. Apart from the money raised by the Church of Częstochowa, there were also state funds, thanks to which meals in canteens were served. The Samaritan activity was a novelty in 1948. Their actions took forms of "Samaritan centers" in various parish branches aiming to provide free medical care. Also this year, the organization of summer camps for children was not neglected. However, running 7 orphanages in the Diocese of Częstochowa with the help of Caritas remained an important issue. In addition to orphanages, there were also 10 kindergartens attended by 554 children. Moreover, Caritas in the area of the Diocese of Częstochowa ran six Old People's Homes, where there were 388 people requiring full-time care. It was not the only form of support for those in need. Caritas also organized legal aid for people who could not afford to pay for such services. The Polish War Relief, as in previous years, offered considerable support. Overall, nearly 18 thousand people benefited from the help of Caritas in Częstochowa.

This activity of Caritas in the Diocese of Częstochowa, as in other dioceses, encountered some difficulties since 1948. The reason for this was the Amendment of the Law of Associations, passed on October 2, 1947. The new version of the government order forced Caritas to register as an association. There was nothing strange in this fact, but it was about the form and manner in which it was to be done. Full details of the charity and the application for registration were supposed to be submitted at provincial offices. Access to such detailed data resulted in the opposition of bishops, and the authorities had to settle for only submitting an application for the registration of the Association and providing the amount of subsidies from the budget. Another manifestation of the pressure from the government was the lack of consent to the publication of data on charitable activities. For this reason, they were done only in typescript. The next year, no official report on the condition of Caritas in Czestochowa was made. Yet it should be expected that in 1949 the charitable activities in the Diocese of Częstochowa were carried out at the same level compared to previous years. Unfortunately, the liquidation of diocesan Caritas destroyed the existing system of its functioning.

Conclusion

The functioning of charity in the Diocese of Częstochowa in the first years after the Second World War was marked by great social commitment. It was probably due to the great needs of people as a result of war damage. In the first years of Caritas, several parish branches were successfully reactivated. It was an important issue that in parish communities there was a mobilized group of the faithful, who was able to organize charitable work. In subsequent years, charity work was carried out on an increasing scale thanks to the support from the government and the Polish War Relief. Dozens of eating places were organized which gave out free meals for the poor. Summer camps were organized for children. University students and elderly people were of course not forgotten either. The entire activity was interrupted by the liquidation of Caritas, which, of course, did not mean abandoning the support for the needy.

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