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Lay Faithful Involvement in the Contemporary Church – The Polish Context

It is not difficult to notice a ‘galloping’ secularisation in contemporary Polish society¹. It is obvious in younger age groups. Among young Poles, the percentage of people declaring that God and religion are important in their lives is falling². The rate of people attending mass at least once a week is falling very sharply³. Poles are becoming more tolerant, liberal, and secular every year⁴. The number of priestly and religious vocations is also declining⁵. Poles are increasingly critical of the Catholic Church as an institution and of the clergy⁶. They are also questioning the value of the Church’s charitable activities, the legitimacy of religion classes at school, and theological studies conducted in

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¹ See and cf. *Wiara i niewiara w Kościół. Wyzwania kryzysu i poszukiwanie dróg jego przezwyciężenia*, ed. K.J. Glombik, Opole 2023; M. Grabowska, *Zmiany religijności społeczeństwa polskiego*, „Socjologiczna agora: Wykłady mistrzowskie” 1(2024), p. 57; A. Piskozub-Piwosz, *Wciąż katolicka, ale inaczej*, „Znak” 824(2024), p. 104-105.

² K. Kaźmierska, *Czy to faktycznie jakiś tam ma sens? Współczesne doświadczenia (nie) religijne młodego pokolenia*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej” 19(2023), no 4, p. 118-139.

³ See and cf. e.g. A. Zellman, *Kształtowanie wrażliwości sumienia katechizowanej młodzieży w kontekście współczesnej aksjologii*, „Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana” 2016, p. 201-215; P. Sadura, *Liberalizacja i sekularyzacja społeczeństwa polskiego 1989-2020. Analiza socjologiczna*, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/warschau/17124.pdf> (access: 22.07.2024).

⁴ M. Bożewicz, *Religijność Polaków w ostatnich dziesięcioleciach*, CBOS. Komunikat z Badań 2024, no 50, p. 1-6, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2024/K_050_24.PDF (access: 1.08.2024).

⁵ T. Adamczyk, *Autentyczność i duchowość. Księga w opinii polskiej młodzieży. Analiza socjologiczna*, Lublin 2020.

⁶ See and cf. e.g. M. Migalski, *List otwarty prof. Marka Migalskiego do Rektora UŚ oraz odpowiedź Rektora w sprawie postulatów likwidacji Wydziału Teologicznego*, <https://gazeta.us.edu.pl/node/433603> (access: 3.02.2024); P. Rudkouski, *Problem argumentacji w teologii*, <https://depotuw.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/item/1685/3501-DR-FF-78072700000.pdf?sequence=1> (access: 11.02.2024).



state universities⁷. They also question the legitimacy of the didactic activities carried out in theology faculties⁸. They also question the legitimacy of the teaching activities carried out in theology faculties⁹. In doing so, they see an increase in dogmatism and clericalism¹⁰. In the context of these social processes, the Church recalls the subjective role of lay Catholics in the Church¹¹. It also undertakes various initiatives that indicate that all the baptised are responsible for the community of the Church and follow a common path toward salvation¹².

In theoretical programming, the theme of the involvement of the lay faithful in the Church has been present for a long time. For example, mention can be made of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the teaching of the popes (e.g. John Paul II, and Pope Francis)¹³. Also, the authors of the documents of diocesan synods in Poland pay special attention to this issue¹⁴. Theologians addressing these issues, taking into account various aspects of the place, role and tasks of the lay faithful in the Church¹⁵. In practice, the problem

⁷ T. Adamczyk, *Autentyczność i duchowość. Księża w opinii polskiej młodzieży. Analiza socjologiczna*, p. 10-21.

⁸ See and cf. e.g. J. Baniak, *Zaufanie i nieufność dorosłych katolików do Kościoła instytucjonalnego w Polsce. Na podstawie wyników badań socjologicznych z przełomu XX i XXI wieku*, „Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeszkie” 29(2022), p. 223-248; J. Mariański, *Katolicy z Polski na rozdrożu*, „Humaniora. Czasopismo Internetowe” 43(2023), no 3, p. 105-112; J. Podgórska, *Wydziały teologiczne, czyli szkoły zawodowe dla katechetów. Kościół korzysta, państwo płaci*, Wydziały teologiczne, czyli szkoły zawodowe dla katechetów. Kościół korzysta, państwo płaci (polityka.pl) (access: 1.08.2024).

⁹ J. Podgórska, *Wydziały teologiczne, czyli szkoły zawodowe dla katechetów. Kościół korzysta, państwo płaci*.

¹⁰ See and cf. J. Mariański, *Scenariusze przemian religijności i Kościoła katolickiego w społeczeństwie polskim. Studium diagnostyczno-prognostyczne*, Lublin 2021; E. Mikiciuk, *Przećwi klerykaturze. Stanisława Brzozowskiego „głos wśród nocy” Kościoła*, „Więź” 68(2022), p. 129-142.

¹¹ See and cf. e.g. K. Lenzion, *Postawy świeckich wobec działalności misyjnej Kościoła katolickiego (konteksty teoretyczne i empiryczne)*, „Studia Humanistyczne AGH” 20(2021), no 3, p. 69-90.

¹² This is evidenced, among other things, by the synod on synodality. See e.g. *Międzynarodowa Komisja Teologiczna, Synodalność w życiu i misji Kościoła*, <https://synod.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/miedzynarodowa-komisja-teologiczna-synodalnosc-w-zyciu-i-misji-kosciola-20211023225913.pdf> (access: 2.08.2024); *XVI zwyczajne zgromadzenie ogólne synodu biskupów pierwsza sesja (4-29 października 2023), Sprawozdanie podsumowujące kościół synodalny w misji*, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/polish/POL-Synthesis-Report.pdf> (dostęp: 2.08.2024); cf. e.g. M. Kozyra, *Synodalność we wspólnotach parafialnych w nauczaniu Papieża Franciszka*, „Zeszyty Formacji Katechetów” 92(2023), no 4, p. 25-46.

¹³ See e.g. ChL; DA; EG.

¹⁴ See e.g. M. Polak, *Synodalna droga odnowy parafii. Aktualność refleksji III powojennego Synodu Archidiecezji Gnieźnieńskiej*, „Studia Pastoralne” 18(2022), p. 101-116; J. Wojtczak, *Udział świeckich w przebiegu II Synodu Diecezji Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeszkiej oraz ich rola wynikająca z uchwał synodalnych*, „Rocznik Skrzatuski” 11(2023), p. 223-234.

¹⁵ See e.g. M. Fiałkowski, *Współpraca duchownych i świeckich w Kościele w kontekście procesu synodalnego*, „Studia Pastoralne” 18(2022), p. 136-147; cf. W. Czupryński, *Wizerunek*

of the vocation and mission of lay people in the Church in Poland still raises many controversies¹⁶. It raises questions about their authentic, inconspicuous activity and responsibility for the quality of the ecclesial community¹⁷. In practice, there is a lack of understanding and appreciation of the place and role of the lay faithful in the Church¹⁸. Thus, the lay faithful do not feel sufficiently noticed, involved, valued, and needed¹⁹.

This becomes apparent not only in liturgical assembly but also in various forms of pastoral care²⁰. Often lay people, who are very well prepared in terms of content and formation, theologically educated and committed to the Church, are marginalised²¹. It also happens that the lay faithful become clericalised: they become similar to priests, want to imitate clerics and take over some of their functions, which belong to the hierarchy and result from ordination²².

In Poland, there is no adequate model, responding to the changes of secularisation, of being involved lay faithful in the Church, aware of their vocation, tasks, rights, and duties²³. There are only general, almost identical to the indications contained in the documents of the universal Church, proposals for the activity of the lay faithful in the Church in Poland. Importantly, they are often not translated into pastoral practice. And yet it is the lay faithful who constitute the largest part of the ecclesial community. Without them, there is no Church both in the hierarchical, structural, external sense and in the internal, community-forming sense. Moreover, the fulfilment of the tasks Christ has entrusted to the Church is not possible without the active involvement of lay Catholics, aware of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world.

The above-described social and ecclesial situation implies the need to resume scholarly reflection on the involvement of the lay faithful in the contemporary Church in Poland. The analyses undertaken in this study aim to present the most important areas of involvement of the lay faithful of the Church in

małżeństwa i rodziny na stronach internetowych Warmińskich parafii, „Studia Elckie” 23(2021), no 3, p. 341-355.

¹⁶ See and cf. e.g. G.A. Czerwonka, *Posługa duszpasterzy wobec rodzin. Studium z duszpasterstwa rodzin w świetle badań prezbiterów w archidiecezji przemyskiej*, <https://repozytorium.kul.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/6daa6c58-4935-4e6c-89cf-e9dd16e3e792/content> (dostęp: 2.08.2024); J. Mikołajec, *Posługa teologów świeckich w Kościele w Polsce*, Opole 2000.

¹⁷ More about this see e.g. in: J. Bartoszek, *Laikat w Kościele*, Ks. Jan Bartoszek: Laikat w Kościele (teologiapolityczna.pl) (access: 3.08.2024).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ This is evidenced, among other things, by the research carried out in connection with synodality in the Church and by the voice of the Congress of Catholic Women and Catholics who are jointly seeking positive answers to the question of the future of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland; Association of Lay Catechists. See e.g. Kongres Katoliczek i Katolików, Kongres Katoliczek i Katolików (kongreskk.pl) (dostęp: 2.08.2024); *Synodalność wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce*, eds. M. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Warszawa 2023.

²⁰ J. Bartoszek, *Laikat w Kościele*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Poland, taking into account the current social and religious situation. They constitute a voice in the discussion. They do not pretend to be an exhaustive presentation of the analyzed issues. In this regard, it seems important to seek answers to the following questions: what is the status of the lay faithful in the Church, that is, what place do they occupy in the ecclesial community? What tasks do they have to perform in the Church? What does this translate into pastoral practice in Poland? What needs to change in the area of involvement of the lay faithful in the Church in Poland? In doing so, it is worth referring to good pastoral practices that can provide pastoral inspiration.

The realization of the above research objective was served by the method of analysis of Church documents, the teaching of the popes, and the literature on the subject. On this basis, key aspects concerning the involvement of the lay faithful in the modern Church were identified, which are described synthetically in this study. Particular attention was paid to those practical pastoral solutions that respond to secularization processes in Poland.

The status of the lay faithful in the Church

The lay faithful, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law, constitute the entire community of believers in God, the People of God called to active involvement in the spiritual life²⁴. They do not belong to the priestly state or the religious state, which is legally established in the Church. The lay faithful are Christians who, incarnated by baptism in Christ, established as the People of God, made in their way participants in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ, exercise the mission proper to the whole Christian people in the Church and the world²⁵. Importantly, “by their regeneration in Christ, all the faithful are equal in dignity and action, as a result of which each according to his position and task cooperates in building up the Body of Christ”²⁶. At the same time, the norms of canon law state that the community of the Church has a hierarchical structure. It is led by the successors of Peter and the bishops who are in communion with them. The norms of canon law also emphasize the presence of clergy, who by divine appointment are ministers of the sacraments in the Church. At the same time, the existence of the religious state is emphasized within the community of the Church, which does not relate to the hierarchical structure of the Church but belongs to its life and holiness²⁷. On this basis, it can be assumed that the lay faithful do

²⁴ See e.g. DA 2; KK 10-13, 30-38; KPK, kan. 208; cf. KPK, kan. 204 § 1; cf. W. Seremak, *Świecki*, in: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, ed. M. Chmielewski, Lublin-Kraków 2002, p. 865-866; P. Wojnicz, *Pozycja prawna oraz apostołstwo wiernych świeckich w Kościele rzymskokatolickim*, „*Studia Elckie*” 21(2019), no 3, p. 385-401.

²⁵ KK 31; cf. ChL 1.

²⁶ KPK, kan. 208; cf. 204 § 1; ChL 1.

²⁷ Cf. Sekretariat Generalny Synodu Biskupów, *Instrumentu laboris „Instrumentum Laboris”*. *Życie zakonne i jego posłannictwo w Kościele i świecie* (25.03.1994), <https://www.zyciecia>

not belong to either the clerical or religious state. By virtue of the sacraments given to them (baptism and confirmation), they participate in the priestly, prophetic and royal mission of the Church within the framework of their activities, education and position²⁸.

Importantly, they are an integral part of the People of God. The lay faithful occupy an important place in the Church. "For them, the Church is the vital principle of human society ...: not only ... they belong to the Church, but ... they themselves are the Church, that is, the community of the faithful living on earth under the one leadership of the Pope, and the Bishops in communion with him"²⁹. They participate in the diversity of ministries and in the unity of the mission. "(...) Having become participants in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions, they share in the mission of the entire People of God in the Church and the world"³⁰. The lay faithful undertake the apostolate through their work and involvement in marital, family, social, and political life, which aims to spread the Gospel, imbue daily affairs with the Gospel spirit, and bear witness to the faith.

Tasks of the lay faithful in the Church

The documents of the Church unequivocally indicate that the lay faithful have to fulfill in the Church and the world the tasks proper to them, according to their competencies and talents, resulting from their functions: priestly, prophetic, and royal³¹. They are called about holiness. They carry out this vocation through daily life, participation in the liturgy, professional work, and social involvement. Living in the world (in all daily affairs and duties), dealing with temporal goods to meet their own needs on a personal, family, and social level, contributing to the extent of their abilities and capabilities to economic, social, cultural development, "performing their proper tasks, guided by the spirit of the Gospel"³² are obliged to sanctify the world. By the example of their own lives, especially faith, hope, and love, they are to show Christ to others³³. The laity are apostles in various social environments (family, workplace, media, places of rest and recreation), and their lives are marked by a missionary dimension: "Indeed, they carry out the apostolate through activities directed toward the evangelization and sanctification of people, and toward penetrating and shaping the order of temporal things in accordance with the evangelical spirit, so that

konne.pl/dokumenty/kosciol/jan-pawel-ii/synod-biskupow-o-zyciu-konsekrowanym-1994r/instrumentum-laboris/instrumentum-laboris-105051/ (access: 3.08.2024).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pius XII, Przemówienie do nowych kardynałów z dnia 20.02.1946, AAS 38(1946), p. 149; cf. J. Bartoszek, *Laikat w Kościele*.

³⁰ DA 2.

³¹ DA 2; ChL 23; KK 32; cf. 1 Kor 12,12-31; Ef 4,4-16; 5,21-32; Kol 1,24.

³² KK 31.

³³ Ibid.

their action in this order constitutes a visible witness to Christ and serves to save people³⁴.

The lay faithful are to seek the kingdom of God, to illuminate temporal affairs with the light of faith and active love. They are called to consciously show Christ in their lives - in their proclaimed views, attitudes, style of being, and conduct, and thus serve as an example of evangelical life³⁵. Under the leadership of the hierarchy, the lay faithful share responsibility for the Church. Their tasks include active participation in evangelization, liturgy, charity, and apostolate. They are obliged to cooperate with the clergy in carrying out the mission of evangelization. In other words, the lay faithful should occupy the first place in the ranks of the Church community. Without their presence, there is no living community, and no celebration of the sacraments (e.g., baptism, penance and reconciliation, confirmation, marriage). Therefore, not only the lay faithful should remember this, but also the hierarchy of the Church. And it is not just about verbal declarations, but about practice - application in daily action, decisions, and initiatives. It is the lay faithful who are the Church, "(...) a community of the faithful under the single leadership of the Pope, and the bishops who are in communion with him"³⁶.

The apostolic task of the lay faithful is to take care to provide such conditions for the family that, by its vocation, it is the first place for the "humanization" of the person and society and the "domestic sanctuary of the Church"³⁷. In marriage and family, the lay faithful realize their vocation to holiness as wife, husband, mother, father, child, grandmother, and grandfather. Through professional work and social involvement, they contribute to building a democratic state and preserving and multiplying cultural heritage. Among the most important duties of Christian spouses is "to show and confirm with their lives the indissolubility and sanctity of the marriage knot"³⁸. The contemporary crisis of marriage and family raises special challenges for the lay faithful. It places before the laity several tasks related to the defense of the Decalogue, including the value of every life from conception to natural death³⁹.

The lay faithful, as noted above, by their baptism, share in Christ's royal mission. Accordingly, they can participate in the performance of certain offices and functions in the Church. Their tasks include participation in church advisory bodies, holding church functions and offices, and participating in church governance. For example, those lay faithful who are characterized by appropri-

³⁴ KK 31.

³⁵ KKK 898-900, 904-905; cf. J. Bartoszek, *Rola ludzi świeckich we współczesnym przekazie Ewangelii*, „Symposium” 27(2023), no 2, p. 47-64.

³⁶ Pius XII, *Przemówienie do nowych kardynałów z dnia 20.02.1946*, p. 149.

³⁷ ChL 40; KK 11.

³⁸ DA 11.

³⁹ See more e.g. in: W. Czupryński, *Małżeństwo i rodzina w świadomości policjantów na przykładzie studentów Wyższej Szkoły Policji w Szczytnie. Studium teologiczno-pastoralne*, Olsztyn 2021.

ate prudence and integrity are capable of providing assistance to the Church's pastors as experts or advisors, including in councils in accordance with the law⁴⁰. The Code of Canon Law states that laymen may: 1) serve as chancellor, notary in the diocesan curia, director/employee of the clerk's office, school inspector for religious instruction; 2) serve in the diocesan curia as chancellor, notary. religious instruction; 2) participate in a synod (universal, diocesan) and in economic, pastoral and catechetical councils in the diocese or in expert groups in the diocese (with an advisory voice, studying, considering and proposing new pastoral solutions); 3) establish associations and direct them for charity or piety, for the revival of the Christian vocation in the world⁴¹; 4) study theology and deepen religious knowledge⁴²; 5) undertake in the parish the task of animator in religious communities and movements and other forms of pastoral care⁴³; 6) participate in the parish pastoral council and the economic council⁴⁴; 7) give opinions to candidates for bishop⁴⁵.

In turn, the participation of the laity in the priestly function of Christ gives rise to several tasks that revolve around active participation in the liturgy of the Church⁴⁶. Properly formed and molded lay people can perform the permanent ministry of extraordinary minister, lector, acolyte, and the function of commentator, and cantor⁴⁷. They are also invited to engage in various forms of prayer in the community of the Church and works of penance and charity⁴⁸. In certain cases, where there are needs of the Church community (for example, due to the lack of ministers), the laity, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also perform certain duties in place of these ministers, namely: the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, administer baptism, distribute Holy Communion⁴⁹.

Also, the participation of the lay faithful in the prophetic function gives rise to specific tasks. It requires constant knowledge of the Gospel and its proclamation in word and deed⁵⁰. The participation of the laity in the prophetic function finds expression in the involvement of lay catechists in schools and parishes. In addition to such activity, the work of lay lecturers at Catholic universities and theology faculties should be mentioned. In this context, the minis-

⁴⁰ KPK, kan. 228 § 2; cf. P. Wojnicz, *Pozycja prawna oraz apostołstwo wiernych świeckich w Kościele rzymskokatolickim*, p. 385-401.

⁴¹ KPK, kan. 215.

⁴² KPK, kan. 229.

⁴³ KKK, 517 § 2.

⁴⁴ KPK, kan. 536-537.

⁴⁵ KPK, kan. 377, § 3.

⁴⁶ KPK, kan. 839.

⁴⁷ KPK, kan. 230.

⁴⁸ Ibid; cf. P. Wojnicz, *Pozycja prawna oraz apostołstwo wiernych świeckich w Kościele rzymskokatolickim*, p. 385-401.

⁴⁹ KPK, kan. 230 § 3.

⁵⁰ KKK 904-905; KK 12, 35.

try of parish catechists established by Pope Francis is noteworthy⁵¹. Saints are also called to be evangelizers. This task applies especially to members of religious movements and communities, who are collaborators with priests in the work of evangelization in school, parish, family, media, local environment, politics, and culture.

Planes of involvement of the lay faithful in the Church in Poland

In the context of the above-described status of the lay faithful and their tasks in the Church, specific planes of action to be undertaken by the lay faithful in the Church in Poland are drawn. They are almost identical to the tasks of the lay faithful, which are defined in the documents of the Church and the teaching of the popes. They should be treated as crucial, especially in the current situation, in which the role of the laity in the Church in Poland is often limited to posed actions and an advisory voice, which is not taken into account in pastoral decisions⁵². In pastoral practice in Poland, it is often possible to notice a clear imbalance between declarations and the practical approach to greater participation of the lay faithful in the life of the church community and the administration of various sectors of its life.

Undoubtedly, the sacramental plane deserves attention. It concerns the sacrament of marriage and baptism. In practice, it is worth constantly reminding fiancées and spouses that the priest or deacon assisting with the sacrament of marriage is only an official witness. The spouses administer this sacrament to themselves. It is also worth making the laity aware that in emergencies (e.g., the danger of loss of life) when there is no ordinary minister nearby, any layperson with the right intention can administer baptism.

Other forms worthy of attention in pastoral practice in Poland, include the active participation of the lay faithful in the liturgy of the Church (e.g., in the function of commentator, cantor), the ministry of the extraordinary minister, lector and acolyte involvement in various forms of prayer in the community of the Church and in works of penance and charity⁵³. In the future, due to the decreasing number of priests, due to the shortage of ministers, the laity will likely take on duties in place of ministers (e.g., ministry of the word, presiding over liturgical prayers, distributing Holy Communion, administering funeral rites)⁵⁴.

⁵¹ See and cf. Franciszek, *List Apostolski w formie „Motu Proprio” „Antiquum Ministerium” w którym ustanawia posługę katechety* (10.05.2021), Polish text: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.pdf (access: 24.07.2024); M. Polak, *Posługa katechisty w świetle Listu apostolskiego Antiquum ministerium papieża Franciszka*, „Studia Warmińskie” 60(2023), p. 239-253.

⁵² See more in: Bartoszek, *Rola ludzi świeckich we współczesnym przekazie Ewangelii*, p. 47-64.

⁵³ KPK, kan. 230, 839.

⁵⁴ KPK, kan. 230.

The administrative level is also noteworthy. The lay faithful can serve the community of the Church using their own skills, abilities, professional competence. This is especially true of involvement in the parish. For example, we can mention such ministries as working in the parish chancellery, maintaining the website and social network, participating in the parish Caritas team, involvement in the activities of the parish economic council, and overseeing the repair and construction of sacred buildings in the parish. Also, work in curial offices (e.g., in the catechetical department, pastoral department, the bishop's court, the economic department) and in the administration of the seminary is a suitable platform for the lay faithful⁵⁵.

Greater involvement of the laity in activities related to the contemporary transmission of the Gospel in various environments, that is, the plane of Christian formation, is also vitally needed. This includes the active participation of the laity in the implementation of religious instruction in school and various forms of parish catechesis. No less important is the ministry of lay catechists and evangelizers to parish-based religious movements and communities, as well as to various evangelization and formation initiatives in the diocese. In this context, the work of the lay faithful at Catholic universities and theological faculties in Poland and involvement in politics and culture should be considered important.

Good practices

Analyzing the online resources of dioceses and parishes in Poland, one can see that the area of involvement of the lay faithful in the Church is expanding⁵⁶. It includes various forms of activity excluding only what is reserved for the authority of ordination. The laity participates in synods (e.g., diocesan, universal – in the ongoing October 2021. XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops)⁵⁷. They hold positions in bishops' courts and curial departments (e.g., family ministry, catechetical). They work in public and Catholic media and Catholic universities in theology departments (as university teachers). Among religion teachers in public and Catholic schools lay people predominate. It is also not uncommon for lay faithful to engage in social media,

⁵⁵ Cf. P. Wojnicz, *Pozycja prawna oraz apostołstwo wiernych świeckich w Kościele rzymskokatolickim*, p. 385-401.

⁵⁶ See and cf. e.g. Franciszkanie z Zatorza, <https://franciszkanie-zatorze.net/wspolnoty-parafialne/>, (access: 5.08.2024); Parafia i Sanktuarium św. Józefa w Krakowie – Podgórzu, <https://jozef.diecezja.pl/category/wspolnoty/> (access: 7.08.2024); Parafia p.w. N.M.P. Królowej Polski w Głogowie, <https://zycieparafii.pl/wspolnoty-i-grupy-duszpasterskie/> (access: 8.08.2024); Parafia Rzymskokatolicka Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w Lubartowie, <https://mbozejlubartow.pl/wspolnoty-parafialne/> (access: 7.08.2024).

⁵⁷ See and cf. e.g. Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, Synod 2021-2024. Synteza krajowa, <https://synod.org.pl/synteza-krajowa/> (access: 5.08.2024); S. Walczak, *Rola świeckich w Synodzie: nowe perspektywy i możliwości*, <https://synodpoznan.pl/rola-swieckich-w-synodzie-nowe-perspektywy-i-mozliwosci/> (access: 4.08.2024).

politics, and business, treating these areas as a space for evangelization and witness to the faith⁵⁸.

In the parish, the laity not only actively participate in prayer and formation communities, but also serve as leaders or animators. Importantly, they are involved in evangelization and catechumenal activities (preparation for the sacraments). More and more lay people are actively participating in the liturgy, serving as acolytes, lectors, or in the functions of commentator, and cantor. The lay faithful are involved in leading the schola and parish choir. In many parishes, they organize walking and bus pilgrimages. It is not uncommon for the lay faithful to lead cultural activities in the parish by organizing, for example, festivals, carol evenings, patriotic evenings, trips to the theater, going to the cinema, film discussion clubs, and parish libraries. Also noteworthy in this space of involvement of the lay faithful are social and charitable activities carried out within the framework of the parish "Caritas" such as, for example, the Schoolbag Full of Smiles, the Bag of Mercy. Increasingly, laypeople in the parish are engaged in sports and recreational activities, organizing canoeing, bicycle tours, and sightseeing trips⁵⁹.

In the space of good practices in parishes in Poland, the involvement of the laity in the administration of the parish and the parish cemetery is also evident. For example, it is possible to mention the participation of the laity in the economic and pastoral council or undertaking tasks related to investments, maintenance, and repair work in the parish⁶⁰.

Noteworthy are the various forms of activity of the lay faithful, which are shown in the "Active Parish" competition (e.g. 2022, 2023, 2024)⁶¹. They confirm that the parish is a community of communities that educate and evangelize themselves and others. The laity discovers its place in such a parish and takes joint responsibility for its shape and the quality of its various pastoral forms.

⁵⁸ See and cf. e.g. Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego, *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia. Dane za rok 2021*, Warszawa 2022, https://www.iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dokumenty/ISKK_Annuarium_dane_za_2021_www.pdf (access: 7.08.2024); S. Nowotny, *Nauczanie religii w polskich szkołach w świetle badań empirycznych*, https://www.iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dane/nawotny_prezentacja_28.08.15.pdf (access: 8.08.2024).

⁵⁹ See and cf. *Ibid*; *Katolickie organizacje charytatywne. Raport z badań katolickich organizacji charytatywnych oraz przyparafialnej aktywności charytatywnej*, oprac. W. Sadłoń, Warszawa 2021, https://www.iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dane/ISKK_organizacje_charytatywne_2021.pdf (access: 6.08.2024); A. Zellma, *Innowacyjne inicjatywy pedagogiczne w środowisku szkolnym i parafialnym*, „*Studia Ełckie*” 19(2017), p. 675-689.

⁶⁰ See and cf. W. Sadłoń, *Religijny kapitał społeczny. Kapitał społeczny a Kościół katolicki w społecznościach lokalnych w Polsce*, https://www.iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dane/Sadlon_Dr.pdf (access: 6.08.2024).

⁶¹ See and cf. amk, *Znamy finalistów konkursu „Aktywna parafia” 2022*, <https://www.ekai.pl/znamy-finalistow-konkursu-aktywna-parafia-2022/> (access: 8.-8.2024); hsz, *Znamy finalistów konkursu „Aktywna parafia” 2023*, <https://www.ekai.pl/znamy-finalistow-konkursu-aktywna-parafia-2023/> (access: 6.08.2024); KAI/ mł, *10 finalistów w konkursie „Aktywna parafia”. 15 czerwca poznamy zwycięzcę*, <https://deon.pl/kosciol/10-finalistow-w-konkursie-aktywna-parafia-15-czerwca-poznamy-zwycieska-wspolnote,2840381> (access: 6.08.2024).

Conclusion

The described planes of involvement of the laity in the Church in Poland, show the wide and multifaceted space of active participation of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church in the modern world. In practice, often the involvement of the lay faithful is reduced only to traditional and external forms (such as religious practices). Hence, the activity of the lay faithful needs to be revitalized. What is needed here is both a change of mentality on the part of the hierarchy (bishops, priests) and the laity. Undoubtedly, it is the task of bishops and presbyters to value the laity, motivate and stimulate their activity for evangelization, and accompany them in realizing their vocation to holiness.

There is also a need for constant reflection on the role of the laity in the Church in Poland. It is worth enriching it with sociological research, which will not only contribute to the diagnosis, but also to the development of new pastoral strategies. This will make it possible to plan and implement pastoral actions that will respond to the “signs of the times”.

In the current situation, when there is a clear crisis of the institutional Church in Poland, a great deal depends on the laity, on their authentic commitment and witness to the faith. At the same time, it should be remembered that at the basis of good cooperation between the laity and the clergy is respect, openness, and the ability to actively listen. Related to this is also the awareness that we are all equal in the dignity of a child of God. Moreover, everyone in the Church community has his or her place and different functions and sentences to fulfill. This approach is the basis for building good and sincere relations between the laity and clergy, and authentic and fruitful cooperation. It is also important for the clergy (bishops, priests) to be convinced that God’s Spirit works through the laity, and to discern together with the laity what God is inviting them to do, and what decisions and actions they should take. There is a need for joint prayer, the ability to take on new challenges, and to give the laity responsibility for the Church.

* * *

Summary

The involvement of the lay faithful in the community of the Church is at the center of theological reflection after the Second Vatican Council. It is among the key issues in practical theology in Poland. Theoretical indications are often not translated into pastoral practice. In fact, it is possible to notice the posed actions and activities related to the involvement of the lay faithful in the community of the Church. Hence, changes in pastoral practice are needed.

The analyses undertaken in this article are a voice in the discussion. They show the most important areas of involvement of the lay faithful of the Church in Poland, taking into account the current social and religious situation. First,

the status of the lay faithful in the Church and the basic tasks they have to perform in the Church are described. In this context, the basic planes of involvement of the lay faithful in the Church in Poland were presented. This made it possible to show the translation of the guidelines enshrined in the documents of the Church and in the teaching of the Popes into pastoral practice in Poland. To enrich the analyses, reference was made to good practices that illustrate the involvement of lay faithful in pastoral, evangelization, administrative, cultural, and social activities. The need for in-depth research and the development of new pastoral strategies was also pointed out. It was considered important to change the mentality of the hierarchy (bishops) and priests) and to raise the level of awareness of the lay faithful and motivate them to be more active in the community of the Church.

Keywords: lay faithful, Church, pastoral, evangelization, catechization, parish.

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