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Presbyters and Lay Faithful in the Process of Parish Building in the Face of Today’s Challenges

Leading to a living faith, expressed in living a personal relationship with Jesus, is the foundation and guarantee of the effectiveness of any pastoral action. Analysing the socio-cultural contexts and phenomena in which the life of the Church takes place is an issue that is always topical. The changes taking place in the cultural space as a result of the various currents of thought need to be constantly observed and theologically interpreted so that corresponding imperatives and programmes of action can be worked out for the current theological models, on the basis of which pastoral activity in specific ecclesial communities should be carried out¹.

The contemporary context of postmodernism’s increasingly visible confrontation with Christianity², and even the entire cultural heritage of our civilisation becomes a kind of catalyst for an in-depth reflection on the concept of pastoral care. In order to undertake it according to the methodological theological-pastoral paradigm: “see – evaluate – act”, it is necessary to discern the current situation more accurately, to make a certain synthetic characterisation, to identify existing threats and then, in the area of pastoral care, to identify concrete solutions. Therefore, the questions to be asked are: What pastoral concept should be adopted to overcome the crisis of credibility of Christianity? How do we undertake the effective work of Christian formation? What choices should be made within the framework of a renewed pastoral programme?

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¹ B. Drożdż, *Uwarunkowania społeczno-kulturowe ewangelizacji w Polsce na początku XXI wieku*, in: *Ewangelizacja odpowiedzią Kościoła w Polsce na wyzwania współczesności*, ed. W. Przygoda, E. Robek, Sandomierz 2011, p. 57.

² See Z. Sareło, *Postmodernizm: wyzwanie dla chrześcijaństwa*, Poznań 1995.

1. The courage to make a diagnosis

From the outset, it is necessary to conclude that the need for a renewal of the Church towards a pastoral programme under the sign of evangelisation, catechumenate and the building up and realisation of the Church as a “community of communities” is not only a consequence of the current crisis of faith and the hostile cultural trends of the present era. The fundamental source of the crisis of faith – irrespective of the socio-cultural context – is always some kind of incapacity of the community of believers to carry out the mission of transmitting the faith. The main motive for change is the need to return to a proper ecclesiology. In terms of reflection, this took place sixty years ago, receiving its eloquent confirmation in the most important documents of the last Council.

The demands for a change in the concept of pastoral care are the fruit of earlier reflection by various ecclesial bodies. One example is the Italian bishops, who saw the urgent need to move from a pastoral ministry preserving the previous style with a clear cultic face to an evangelising and initiatory pastoral ministry, describing this indispensable process as a “pastoral conversion”³. The Italian episcopate has indicated directions for the necessary changes. Pastoral care is to take the form of Christian initiation with all its elements, such as witness, proclamation of the kerygma, sacraments, mystagogy, witness of love⁴.

However, it seems that the renewed ecclesiology has not been absorbed by pastoral practice; it has not significantly influenced the mentality of those responsible for the implementation of pastoral care and catechesis. Despite many efforts and goodwill, the pastoral practice of the Church *has not kept up with the times* and continues to be attached to a Christian situation that no longer exists. Pastoral care, in spite of its difficulties, follows the beaten and time-honoured paths of tradition. In the inner construction of man marked by sin there is a fear of what is new. As soon as he hears the call to change, to convert, to trust in God, he feels reluctance and begins a process of rationalisation to undermine the legitimacy of what is new. This inertia inherent in human nature and symptomatic of the individual is at the same time a characteristic component of the functioning of entire structures and institutions. On the other hand, we should beware of what is a momentary feeling, a desire to please and to conform uncritically to current expectations. This is why in the Church, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, a constant, prudent and courageous reflection is undertaken on a pastoral model adapted to the needs of the hour of salvation – kairos.

The task of in-depth reflection and the courage to make a diagnosis become more urgent especially in the context of the currently very dynamic secularization and de-Christianization⁵. We are encouraged to adopt such an attitude

³ K. Misiaszek, *Mistagogia w katechezie*, in: *Studia i Materiały Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach*, ed. A. Żądło, Katowice 2004, p. 87.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ K. Misiaszek, *Programy duszpasterskie: pomoc czy przeszkoda*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 509 (1993), no. 1, p. 76-77.

by Pope Francis in his exhortation when he expresses his hope that appropriate steps will be taken “to follow the path of pastoral and missionary conversion, which cannot leave things as they are. What we need now is not mere administration. Let us be in a permanent state of mission in all regions of the earth”⁶.

The responses to the questionnaire sent out by the Secretariat of the Bishops' Conference of Europe on the challenges of the new evangelization in 2012 are very interesting and rich source material. The primary challenge concerns a culture and society dominated by secularism, hedonism, individualism, materialism, atheism, which also concerns Catholics, who live in a certain percentage of practical atheism. The second challenge is the dominant culture of death today: falling birth rates, abortion, the crisis of marriage and family. The third aspect concerns issues related to the phenomena of emigration and migration. On the one hand, this phenomenon threatens the integrity of the family, on the other: the wide influx of followers of other religions. The fourth challenge concerns the reduction of religion to the private sphere of human life. The last challenge concerns the mass media, which often present a false image of the Church⁷.

Observing the situation of the Church in many parts of Western civilization, one cannot help but feel that the words of Fr. Francis Blachnicki spoken forty years ago are becoming poignantly relevant and truly prophetic. This great theologian and pastor wrote: “The experience of the Church of the present time, eloquently shows that an incomplete, half-hearted, shallow Christianity will not last at all. (...) A quasi-Christianity, based on customs, on the pressure of the environment, does not stand the test of time, does not withstand the social changes that are taking place and is rapidly leading to total secularization. On the other hand, only authentic Christianity, which takes the Gospel seriously as the word of life, which makes radical demands, especially in the area of the commandment of Christian love, forgiveness, proclaims the ideal of evangelical poverty, asceticism, the cross, can maintain itself and have the power of expansion. Such a Christianity, however, by its very nature, will initially be possible only in small groups”⁸.

It is therefore necessary to move away from a purely sociological view of the Church and its pastoral activities. Although the quantitative criterion cannot be disregarded, it is necessary to keep in mind this historical experience of the Church, which says that it has never been strong in quantity. As Fr. M. Polak notes, “the churches that were filled during the Solidarity period, to some extent, lulled pastoral sensitivity and raised the degree of complacency, rather than prompting an in-depth Christian formation. Today, this ‘sociological men-

⁶ Franciszek, Adhortacja apostolska *Evangelii Gaudium. O głoszeniu Ewangelii w dzisiejszym świecie*, Kraków 2013, 25.

⁷ J.L. Moens, *Na czym polega nowa ewangelizacja?*, in: *Nowa Ewangelizacja. Kerygmaticzny impuls w Kościele*, ed. P. Sowa, K. Kaproń, Gubin 2012, p. 24-25.

⁸ F. Blachnicki, *Mala grupa w Kościele*, „Oaza” 9(1993), p. 2-3.

tality' has not been fully overcome, and pastoral actions are still evaluated through the criterion of quantity"⁹.

The situation is well described by Papal Household Theologian Father Wojciech Giertych OP: "One can count people according to *dominantes* or *communicantes*. You can also ask them questions like: do you believe in the existence of the devil? Do you share a wafer at Christmas? Do you accept the Church's teaching on contraception? The conclusions of such a sociological study give a certain picture of society, its religious practices and ethos. They may say something about the place of the Church as a visible reality in the life of a particular community. However, this is an external description that does not penetrate the essence of the Church's mystery: for politicians it may be significant, but for pastoral reflection, in essence, of little importance. If we fall into the trap of thinking that the most important thing is to sustain the existing social phenomena of religiosity, our concern for the Church and for pastoral care will be shallowed at its core"¹⁰. Observation of religious life confirms that many baptized and practicing Catholics have not taken the most important step toward Christian maturity, which is entering into a personal relationship with God and recognizing Jesus as personal Lord and Savior. Hence comes the important conclusion for the pastoral profile that most of our practicing Catholics need evangelization.

2. The kerygmatic and catechumenal turn

The teaching of recent popes very clearly directs the Church toward a pastoral conversion, which is to move from a pastoral of preserving, sustaining and maintaining the current status quo to a pastoral with a firm missionary orientation. The emphasis on evangelization is a consequence of the truth that "at the beginning of being a Christian there is no ethical decision or some great idea, but there is an encounter with an event, with a Person who gives life a new perspective and thus a decisive orientation"¹¹.

The definition, and at the same time the necessity of undertaking the work of the New Evangelization was presented by John Paul II in the following statement: "New social and cultural situations constitute" a great call to a 'new evangelization', that is, to proclaim a Gospel that is always new and always bearing newness; an evangelization that must be carried out with new zeal, with new methods and with new means of expression"¹².

What is the peculiar novelty of these elements? New content is not so much a new kind of teaching. The message of salvation is unchangeable. The

⁹ M. Polak, *Duszpasterskie nawrócenie jako wyraz nowej ewangelizacji w warunkach rozwiniętego modernizmu*, „Teologia Praktyczna” 12(2011), p. 29.

¹⁰ W. Giertych: *Religijność to jeszcze nie wszystko*, „Pastores” 2010, no. 4(49), p. 7.

¹¹ Benedykt XVI, *Encyklika Apostolska Deus caritas est (December 25, 2005)*, Kraków 2006, 217.

¹² Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika Veritatis splendor*, Watykan 1993, 106.

New Evangelization intends neither to broaden nor narrow the message of salvation. Rather, it is about a new distribution of emphasis. A shift from a pastoral ministry focused on the celebration of the sacraments to a pastoral ministry whose primary purpose is to awaken and develop faith. Moving away from a theoretical, doctrinal transmission of the faith and valuing the totality of religious experience¹³. The exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, which is the programmatic document of the current Pope, is the best compendium of knowledge on the key dimensions of evangelization. They are: union with Jesus the fundamental motive for evangelization, the necessity of missionary conversion, evangelization radiating joy, the witness of the Christian life the first stage of evangelization, the proclamation of the kerygma the heart of evangelization, the need to renew the forms of evangelization.

The content of the new evangelization is first of all the kerygma, that is, the proclamation of the person of Jesus as the Good News. The kerygma contains six successive, methodically organized themes, which are at the same time stages of evangelization: (1) God's love, (2) sin, (3) redemption and healing in Jesus, (4) conversion expressed in accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, (5) the Holy Spirit, (6) the community of the Church. The kerygma is a message that demands a response, a decision towards the truths contained in it¹⁴. As Cardinal Gregory Rys notes, evangelization is not meant to be a kind of just another lecture on the truths of faith, but "a dynamic reality taking place here and now, involving me, my life and problems"¹⁵.

Another element of the new evangelization is to emphasize the importance of the community plane. The more effective subject of the new evangelization is not individual preachers, but the community¹⁶. Thus, what is also new is the realization of the Council's thought on highlighting the place and importance of lay Catholics in the salvific ministry of the Church. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, especially Chapter IV, speaks of the essential presence of the laity in the life of the Church, which is accomplished not by delegation, but by virtue of baptism¹⁷. The role and place of the laity in the work of building up the Church as a community is very prominently displayed in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, as well as in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church¹⁸.

¹³ E. Alberich, *Katechumenat nowożytny*, in: *Słownik katechetyczny*, ed. J. Gevaert, K. Misiaszek, Warszawa 2007, p. 485-486.

¹⁴ J. Kochel, *Kerygmat jako treść nowej ewangelizacji*, in: *Nowa ewangelizacja w nowej katechezie*, ed. P. Mąkosa, Rzeszów 2013, p. 34-40.

¹⁵ G. Ryś, *Jezusowa nowa ewangelizacja*, in: *Nowa Ewangelizacja. Kerygmaticzny impuls w Kościele*, Gubin 2012, p. 15.

¹⁶ A. Lewek, *Nowa ewangelizacja*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, ed. R. Kamiński, Lublin 2006, p. 577-578.

¹⁷ J. Michalik, *Miejsce świeckich w społeczności chrześcijańskiej*, AK 464(1986), p. 67-79.

¹⁸ KK 37: "The holy pastors, however, are to recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church, are to willingly avail themselves of their prudent counsel, confidently entrust them with tasks in the service of the Church, and leave them freedom and

The Church is a community of ministries and charisms, and everyone by virtue of baptism is called to participate in the work of the apostolate. Not to be underestimated in this mission are the movements¹⁹.

The new methodology is, in particular, a new evangelistic zeal and enthusiasm, personal testimony of deep faith in God, but also coming from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, evangelistic ingenuity and creativity, the use of audiovisual language, skillful use of modern means of social communication, seeking new ways of cultural dialogue. This new apostolic zeal and enthusiasm, combined with the personal testimony of the preacher, indicates that the first stage of evangelization should be the evangelization of the evangelizers, each of whom himself must undergo evangelization, believe in Christ and make the effort of conversion, that is, a thorough transformation of life²⁰. Pope Francis states plainly, "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus"²¹ and stresses that the work of evangelization, is not a one-time event, but a lifelong process²².

When evangelizing, it is not enough to convey correct doctrine. Language is to reflect the relational dimension of faith, to show the dialogue that God wants to continually conduct with man. Language should therefore be: more personal than mass, more direct than anonymous, more topical than historical, more practical than theoretical, more preached than read, and joyful, uplifting. The proclamation should be confirmed by the testimony of the preacher, so as to show the close connection between the message of salvation and human existence. It is necessary to acquire the ability to proclaim the most important message in history using simple and unambiguous terms. It is necessary to free preaching from so-called 'theological jargon', technical terms understandable only to specialists²³. This is demanded not only by the listeners, but also by the very nature of the kerygma, which is the proclamation of God's love in the language of testimony.

Taking into account the natural dynamics of civilization changes, information affecting the way people function, the new evangelization should use modern technological achievements, which are an effective tool for influencing all spheres of man: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, sensual. In addition to the spoken word, music and image, drama, video, multimedia presentation, etc. are being introduced.

scope for action". DA 24: "It is the duty of the hierarchy to foster the apostolate of the laity, to establish rules and give it spiritual help, and to direct its activity toward the common good of the Church".

¹⁹ See P. Skiba, *Katecheza ewangelizacyjna w nowych ruchach i wspólnotach kościelnych. Studium katechetyczne wybranych ruchów i wspólnot kościelnych*, Lublin 2006.

²⁰ P. Mąkosa, *Kompetencje ewangelizatorów fundamentem nowej ewangelizacji*, in: *Nowa ewangelizacja...*, p. 194.

²¹ Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostolska Evangelii Gaudium...*, 120.

²² *Ibidem*, 121.

²³ W. Prusowski, *Język w katechizacji*, „Katecheta” 45(2000), no. 4, p. 14.

It is therefore necessary to change the overall concept of pastoral ministry, moving from “inherited” Christianity to “proposed” Christianity; from a pastoral ministry focused on the celebration of the sacraments to a pastoral ministry whose primary purpose is to awaken and develop faith. Pastoral ministry should become decidedly more missionary and evangelistic, in order to more effectively demonstrate faith as a personal relationship with God. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the first proclamation of the Gospel. Every Christian must take co-responsibility for the proclamation of the word of God according to his function and gifts received. This responsibility in the first place lies with the bishop and his priests. Of course, the natural protagonists of the work of the new evangelization are the family (the place of the first missionary activity), Catholic schools (in practice, often the place of the first religious formation and evangelization) and associations and communities²⁴.

Ecclesial movements, in which formation based on evangelization-catechumenal practice is carried out in a small community, create a truly ecclesial space for the strengthening of Christian identity and growth of faith. With the help of ecclesial movements, the transformation of the parish into a community of communities can take place. Modern ecclesial movements are also one of the best evangelization tools available to the modern Church.

Without overlooking the religious education of children, the catechetical ministry of the Church in the parish must include and even make its main addressee the adult, who is the main subject of the Church’s salvific ministry. Catechesis of adults is the foundation of effective formation of the younger generation. For it is on adults that the implementation of the family catechumenate and the effectiveness of all catechesis of children and young people depend. Catechesis should take on the character of Christian initiation and introduce the process of transformation and the salvific event of the Paschal Mystery. This perspective of looking at catechesis implies a move away from theoretical and doctrinal transmission of the faith to an appreciation of the totality of religious experience. A systematic lecture of the truths of faith should be preceded by an invitation to “immerse” oneself in the mystery of the work of salvation. This cannot be done in school teaching of religion. The continuation of the existing model of school catechumenate with a strongly intellectual-sacramental face is unacceptable and may contribute to the distortion and reduction of Christianity to the cultivation of tradition and folk rituals, the erroneous identification of faith with a religious worldview.

In the context of the ever-increasing process of secularization, it would be appropriate to introduce parish catechesis, focused on evangelization and mystagogy, in parallel to the school teaching of religion lessons. For faith is the foundation and condition for the fruitfulness of catechetical efforts. This has important implications in the area of preparation of catechists. One cannot limit

²⁴ J.L. Moens, *Na czym polega nowa ewangelizacja? ...*, p. 28.

oneself to imparting substantive and methodological educational competence. An effective evangelizer can only be one who himself experiences a deep relationship with God. For there is a perceived lack of catechists whose lives are a convincing testimony to living out the faith as the most precious source of meaning and joy. Witnessing to the faith must be an inalienable profile of the modern catechist. So-called schools of evangelization run by contemporary renewal movements can be a great help. Participation in such an experience can be a valuable factor for the catechist to revive and deepen his relationship with God, as well as a space for theoretical and practical preparation for evangelizing others.

3. Parish – community of communities

In light of the Church's evangelizing mission, the concern for a renewed pastoral model is linked, on the one hand, to the demand to get out of the circle of "sacramentalism, cultualism and devotionalism"²⁵, on the other, the involvement of laymen properly prepared to carry out the mission of evangelization. In the work of building an organically functioning parish that effectively undertakes the work of evangelization, community building is therefore indispensable. As Andrzej Bajeński notes, Christ's "model of making disciples in practice was based not so much on participation in services and religious rituals, but on regular being part of a small group in which, through mutual help and care, members nurture and perfect their spirituality and learn to transform faith into works"²⁶.

The new evangelization requires the participation of the lay faithful, who serve as a bridge between the parish and people far from the Church. However, in order for the lay faithful to meet such a challenge, they must be grounded in the community, or rather small communities of a formative and apostolic nature. It is therefore necessary to further appreciate the role of communities, associations and movements operating within the parish, which to a large extent are already prepared to carry out the mission of evangelization as "an active and responsible subject of the work of evangelization and salvation"²⁷. One must also ask: Can more be done in the area of promoting wider participation of the faithful in ecclesial movements, communities and associations?

Ultimately, the goal of the new evangelization is "to form mature ecclesial communities in which faith is revealed and realized in all its original meaning as adherence to the person of Jesus Christ and to his Gospel, as encounter and

²⁵ A. Żądło, *Parafia w trzecim tysiącleciu*, Kielce 1999, p. 70.

²⁶ A. Bajeński, *Przedmowa do wydania polskiego*, in: *Małe grupy świadome celu. Jak tworzyć zdrowe wspólnoty?*, ed. P. Gladen, Gubin 2016, p. 7.

²⁷ In the exhortation *Christifideles laici* John Paul II states: "The formation of lay people should be among the priority tasks of the diocese and included in pastoral programs so that all the efforts of the community are directed towards it". Jan Paweł II, *Adhortacja apostołska o powołaniu i misji świeckich w Kościele i w świecie Christifideles laici*, Watykan 1988, 57.

sacramental communion with Christ, as life in a spirit of love and service”²⁸. Evangelization opens to the process of creating a true ecclesial community. In the reality of the Polish Church, it is rather about a kind of transformation of the nameless anonymous mass of parishioners into such a community, in which the main glue will not be organizational factors, but deep personal ties centered around values, accompanied by the obliging practice of Christian life. Community satisfies two basic needs: the need to belong to a community and the need to be a subject of community co-creation²⁹. Secondly – these are small communities. A small community provides an opportunity to share one’s life, to get to know others, to build deep interpersonal ties, to carry out apostolic tasks. For it is in the nature of man to desire to share the experience of faith with others. The crisis of the Church on the old continent, is at the same time a time of spiritual awakening of many people, undertaking in the community the effort to seek for themselves a truly Christian identity. Therefore, as Rick Warren rightly notes: “Churches must grow and become smaller at the same time – grow by evangelization, and become smaller by strengthening fraternal relationships”³⁰.

An important element of a community is its internal dynamism, which triggers a desire for activity and a desire to influence the surrounding reality. A lively community never closes in on itself, takes new initiatives, carries out new projects. If a small community preserves its ecclesial character (unity with the Church, living the word of God, diaconal attitude, witness of Christian life), then it becomes for its members a school of faith and prayer. Such a community is at the same time the best tool for building and realizing the living Church and carrying out its apostolic mission.

The Church, understood as a real community of faith, is the depository of two values whose great deficit is experienced by post-modern societies. These are namely: a sense of meaning in life and the experience of a community of love. In the description of postmodern society presented above, these two values are in a state of progressive disappearance. The statement of this truth should inspire the work of renewing a pastoral ministry oriented toward the proclamation of the kerygma. The fruit of a “pastoral conversion” understood in this way will be greater evangelistic dynamism, and the renewal of the Church understood as a living community of faith.

The Council’s model of the parish, which also emphasizes its evangelization dimension, can only come to fruition through an appropriate pastoral program that includes a clearly defined overall vision for building the parish as a community³¹. As Blachnicki noted, it is not about “pastoral plans with which

²⁸ Ibidem, 34.

²⁹ II Polski Synod Plenarny, *Teksty robocze*, Poznań 1991, p. 206.

³⁰ R. Warren, *Przedmowa do wydania oryginalnego*, in: *Małe grupy świadome celu. Jak tworzyć zdrowe wspólnoty?*, ed. P. Gładen, Gubin 2016, p. 12.

³¹ R. Kamiński, *Parafia w diecezji i Kościele powszechnym*, „Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne” 30(1983), no. 6, p. 100.

one tries to save and fill a vacuum from above, for the reason that these plans are also not based on a holistic, theological vision. Rather, it is about some more or less neat selection of certain slogans and making themes out of it. However, this is not based on an analysis of the actual situation of our Catholicism, because this does not exist on a global scale, and it is not based on the principles of modern pastoral theology or on the conciliar vision of the Church and its realization in the modern world”³². All actions should be accompanied by an awareness of the need for a holistic vision of local community building, giving meaning, purpose and integrity to individual pastoral actions.

It seems that the consequences of not embracing and realizing the concept of parish renewal are particularly felt today. Thus, the question of a model for the formation of presbyters who would be prepared to work in a renewed pastoral formula needs to be raised anew. As B. Biela notes, “on the solution of this problem will depend the state of pastoral ministry in Poland in the spirit of the ecclesiology of the community, and the associated moral renewal of our nation”³³. There is also a need for diligent reflection and search for solutions so that seminary formation teaches to build communities³⁴. For the model of the post-Tridentine parish, as current sociological research shows, is still deeply rooted in the mentality of the priests themselves. All the more reason to do so, since as a rule, priests play a primary role not only in parish management, but also in animating and implementing the social activities of the parish. The new situation after the period of systemic transformation generates new problems, against which the previous model of pastoral care remains helpless. Despite strenuous pastoral efforts, no way is found to effectively counter the process of alienation of many of the baptized from religious life. Among a significant percentage of the pastors surveyed, an attitude of frustration, confusion and even a sense of danger and a kind of helplessness is apparent³⁵. The overabundance of parish responsibilities that many of the pastors surveyed pointed to seems to be the result of little participation by the laity in many areas of parish life, where the direct and personal involvement of the pastor is not necessarily³⁶. The fact of the large percentage of parishioners who declare a desire to participate in parish decisions raises the question of the reasons inhibiting such participation. “It seems that one of the important reasons for this state of affairs is the paternalistic-autocratic style of management found in most parishes in Poland, as well as the

³² F. Blachnicki, *Posłani w duchu Chrystusa Sługi*, Kraków 2023, p. 15.

³³ B. Biela, *Kościół – Wspólnota. Wspólnota jako zasada urzeczywistniania się Kościoła w ujęciu ks. Franciszka Blachnickiego (1921-1987)*, Katowice 1993, p. 242.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ E. Firlit, *Parafia rzymskokatolicka w Polsce w okresie transformacji systemowej. Studium socjologiczne*, Warszawa 1998, p. 298.

³⁶ E. Firlit writes: “The lack of influence on parish decisions, which was stated by two thirds of all lay respondents, is only partly due to their indifference to what is happening in their parish. A significant percentage – 34.8% of all respondents [...] claim that they would like to have an influence on decision-making in the parish”. Ibid., p. 140.

different understanding of the phenomenon of lay participation in parish life by parish priests and by parishioners”³⁷.

A. Sting similarly states: “Few Polish parishes are communities. (...) They resemble more units managed by parish priests, institutions for the purpose of providing religious services to the Catholic community, than authentic communities, demonstrating the Church of Christ and her saving work. (...) If parish ministry is to have a truly missionary character, being a living reflection of the Church’s missionary mission, it cannot be concerned only with preserving the faith in those who already believe and live the faith. It must stimulate to the faith, lead to it those who do not yet have it or have already lost it”³⁸.

B. Biela, on the other hand, points out that the organization of the pastoral life of the Polish Church, both at the level of the diocese and the parish, is deprived of an appropriate organizing principle. The various initiatives, sections and pastoral groups that are emerging exist side by side, deprived of mutual reference and conceptual location in a holistically understood pastoral activity³⁹.

The Polish parish also has other experiences that could serve in the process of its renewal. In the scientific reflection of sociologists of religion, the specific experiences of the Polish Church in the eighties of the last century are indicated. At that time, there was a very dynamic development of religious activity of the laity in various formal and informal structures of parish life. In this process, Father Mariański sees an opportunity for the gradual and consistent transformation of the “people’s Church” into the “community Church”⁴⁰. “In Poland, the need for simultaneous action on two fronts is more or less clearly perceived: protection of the folk Church and its modernization through the development of the community Church. (...) The community, diaconal and dialogical Church does not have to be a threat to the folk Church, on the contrary – it can be a chance for it to modernize and survive in the new socio-cultural conditions”⁴¹. In the last decade, an important role in the discussion on the revitalization of parish and community life was played by books published under the patronage of the Polish Episcopal Conference Team for the New Evangelization: *Rebuilt and Tools for Reconstruction*. Both publications became an inspiration for many priests and lay people in Poland⁴².

It should be noted that in the process of renewal itself there can be no question of any mutual opposition between elite pastoral care and mass pastoral care. The Church embraces everyone in its saving ministry. However, this ministry becomes effective only when the Church becomes a sacrament of unity

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 141.

³⁸ A. Żądło, *Parafia w trzecim tysiącleciu...*, p. 69-75.

³⁹ B. Biela, *Kościół – Wspólnota...*, p. 236.

⁴⁰ J. Mariański, *Kościół katolicki w społeczeństwie obywatelskim*, Lublin 1998, p. 123.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 153-154.

⁴² M. White, T. Corcoran, *Odbudowana, czyli jak przebudzić wiernych, dotrzeć do zagubionych i nadać Kościołowi znaczenie. Historia katolickiej parafii*, Gubin 2013; M. White, T. Corcoran, *Narzędzia do Odbudowy, czyli 75 praktycznych sposobów na lepszą parafię*, Gubin 2015.

and a sign of community. The realization of the Church as a community of communities is at the same time the only way to effective pastoral care of all⁴³.

Transforming a parish into a community of communities assumes the following: assimilating the image of the Church as a communion and the related change in the model of parish pastoral care; opening up to new religious movements and to the laity, without whom there is no Church or true evangelization; appropriate preparation of the laity for co-responsibility for the mission of the Church; recognizing charisms and recognizing their role in parish pastoral care; moving from pastoral care (sacramentalism, cultualism and devotionalism) to evangelization⁴⁴. Similar content can be found in Benedict XVI's Letter for the Year for Priests (2010), in which the Pope stated: "I am pleased to be able to address to priests, in this year dedicated to them, a special encouragement: that they may be able to grasp the new springtime that the Spirit is awakening in the Church in our days, not in a secondary place through new ecclesial movements and new communities. (...) In this respect, the indication of the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* is important: 'While testing the spirits to see whether they come from God, (priests) should discover in a spirit of faith the different charisms of the laity, both small and great, acknowledge them with joy and foster them with solicitude'. (...) From the communion between priests and charisms can truly flow «a valuable impulse for a renewed commitment of the Church to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel of hope and love in every corner of the world»"⁴⁵.

⁴³ F. Blachnicki justified this idea as follows: "What should be the tactics of the Church in its realization, should it focus on creating true, complete communities, realizing all the essential theological elements of the Church as a community, being a truly living Church, an incarnation of its essence – accepting, however, the situation of the diaspora (because we must realistically assume that only certain elites are able to accept and realize full Christianity), or should the Church's concern rather go towards embracing the widest possible masses, in order to be a people's Church (...), deciding, however, to reduce the requirements of Christian life to a minimum, so that as many people as possible could still fit within the framework of the Church understood in this way? (...) The direction of resolving the dilemma posed in the council documents seems to be clearly outlined. It is immediately shown in both council constitutions on the Church. (...) The presented perspective does not allow for the acceptance of alternative solutions: either the world, or the Church, or the diaspora – a community of the chosen ones, or a "people's Church" for all. The solution is contained in the words "sacrament of unity", "sign and instrument", "universal mission", "message of salvation... for all". The Church is for the world, for all. The more the Church is itself, the more it knows and realizes its essence, the more it is for others, the clearer the sign and the more effective the sacrament of unity and salvation for all. In other words: the more the Church concentrates and realizes itself in the local community, trying to fully reveal its essence in it (the more it realizes itself in the situation of diaspora), the better it serves the cause of salvation for all". F. Blachnicki, *Teologia pastoralna ogólna*, part 2: *Eklezjologiczna dedukcja teologii pastoralnej*, Lublin 1971, p. 249-250.

⁴⁴ B. Biela, *Znaki i wymagania czasu dla Ruchu Światło-Życie*, „Oaza” 2006, no. 77, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Benedykt XVI, *List do kapłanów na Rok Kapłański*, www.ekai.pl/biblioteka/dokumenty/x715/list-benedykta-xvi-do-kaplanow-na-rok-kaplanski/ (access: 15.08.2010).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be stated that among the postulates addressed to pastoral care today, the most important is the problem of awakening faith. Its essence is the act of accepting Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, which takes place in evangelical proclamation. Only in this way is a community born in the vertical and horizontal dimension. Therefore, evangelization enables the realization of the Church in the human person through the proclamation of the word and constant conversion. Evangelization is also the first and necessary stage of building a community. Without it, any Christian formation is impossible, as well as diaconate, which conditions the effectiveness of pastoral care and the vitality of the parish. Therefore, the requirement of the present time is to implement a model of evangelical pastoral care, open and searching for new, more adequate to the present times ways of evangelical activity of the Church, and to rebuild the entire pastoral activity in such a way that it serves to form communities of Christian life within the parish.

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Summary

The appeal to carry out the work of the New Evangelization leads to changes in the general concept of pastoral work. It is essential to turn 'inherited' Christianity into 'proposed' Christianity and pastoral work that is concentrated on administering sacraments into the one that awakens and develops faith. In order to show faith as a personal relation with God more successfully the chaplaincy should become more missionary and evangelical in its character.

The objective of the parish is to make a permanent effort in becoming a real sign that is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God. Among other things, it should be manifested in the promotion of the new form of ecclesial community that is the community of communities, the communion of services and charismata. The modern ecclesial movements are one of the most effective tools for evangelization available to the Church in the modern world. However, it seems that modern movements and associations that follow the theological renewal after Second Vatican Council are still underestimated and unemployed.

Another important conclusion is the necessity to highlight the important role of the lay in the apostolic mission of the Church. The involvement of the lay in a Church life should take place through their active participation in liturgy. What is more, they ought to participate in services and assignments to realize the communion parish vision. Creating small basic communities that reveal church communion and become evangelization centres may result in parish activation and renewal, and at the same time practicing cooperation between the shepherds and the lay. A parish community understood as cooperation between the clergy and the laity becomes the real sign of the Church.

Keywords: parish, community of communities, new evangelization, catechumenate.

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