THE PARISH PASTORAL CARE AND THE IMMIGRANTS

Abstract. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs more and more people come to Poland in order to settle here. Although Poland is considered to be one of the least attractive countries in the European Union for incomers, many of them marry Polish citizens, find a job, study or start their own business in Poland. Such people live in big cities as well as in towns, becoming the members of local communities. Some of them are Catholics of various denominations, others are Christians from other Churches, some are non-believers or remain indifferent to any religion. They all, however, constitute a challenge for pastoral care of the family which aims at bringing them closer to Christ. Parish pastoral care priests, as it is indicated in the teaching of the Church, can undertake various initiatives according to the religious or denominational affiliation of the immigrants and their needs. The forms of assistance of pastoral care priests involve satisfying spiritual, psychological and material needs of incomers. However, the main aim of pastoral care is to integrate the newcomers with the local community.

Key words: pastoral care; parish; immigrants.

The social and political changes in Poland after 1989 resulted in the liberalization of the cross-border regulations. It has become possible for the Polish people to travel from and to Poland. The phenomenon of migration has been intensified. With the accession to the European Union and opening of labour markets in Western Europe after 2006, the wage-earning emigration has increased. This phenomenon has been perceived by the Church in Poland as a pastoral challenge and, therefore, steps have been taken to provide the emigrants with the pastoral care. The Polish emigrants’ pastoral care has been improved with new initiatives, its structures have been

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expanded and new priests from Poland have been sent to serve the emigrants. The integration of the emigrants from Poland with the local communities has become an important issue.

So far, less attention has been paid to the issues connected with the pastoral care of the incomers to Poland. The phenomenon of immigration used to be a minor issue in comparison to the emigration of the Polish citizens, and it was of minor importance to the local Polish communities. However, in the recent years the issue of immigrants has been commonly present in the media and in the social debate due to the presence of refugees from eastern Ukraine and the growing number of refugees who come to Europe mainly from the Near East and from North Africa.

However, according to EUROSTAT, Poland is considered to be the worst destination among the countries in Europe, as the number of immigrants in Poland is the lowest among the countries of the European Union, both the nationals of the European Union and the immigrants from other countries, although every year immigrants come to Poland to settle here. Among them, apart from Catholics, are those belonging to other denominations, as well as non-Catholics, Christians and the followers of other religions and non-believers. They live in the local communities and parishes. Their presence is a great challenge for the local parish pastoral care. It must, however, be faced. This necessity concerns not only Christians but also the followers of other religions and non-believers.

1. THE SCALE OF IMMIGRATION IN POLAND

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, in 2015 12,325 foreigners applied for the refugee status or for the international right of asylum in Poland. The number is twice as big as the number of the applicants from 2014. Among those people 4,927 refugees submitted the applications that year. The largest percentage of the asylum seekers were the citizens of the Russian Federation—around 65% (7,989 people). The percentage increased, as in 2014 it equalled 42%. The second largest group of foreigners were the Ukrainians—around 19% (2,305 people). This percentage decreased in comparison to the previous year when the Ukrainians constituted ca. 34% of

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those applying for the refugee status or for the international right of asylum. Moreover, other foreigners such as the citizens of Tajikistan (541 people), Georgia (394 people), Syria (295 people), Armenia (195 people) and Kyrgyzstan (147 people), also applied for the status.

In 2015, the refugee status was granted to 348 foreigners. Among them the majority were the citizens of Syria—203 people. Furthermore, it was also granted to 24 of the Iraqi citizens, 21 citizens of the Russian Federation, 20 stateless people, 15 citizens from Egypt, 14 Belarusians, and 12 people from Turkmenistan. In 2014, the refugee status was granted to 262 people (115 citizens of Syria, 25 people from Afghanistan, 22 stateless people, 22 citizens of Kazakhstan, 13 incomers from the Russian Federation, 14 Belarusians, 12 citizens of Somalia, and 10 people from Egypt). The number of people who were granted the refugee status in 2015 was 33% greater than the number from the previous year.

It should also be noted that, for various reasons, 16 people (11 citizens of Afghanistan, 4 people from Iraq, 2 Russian Federation citizens and 1 citizen of Somalia) were deprived of the refugee status. 2,877 people were denied the status. The number is greater in comparison to the amount from 2014 when 1,997 of the applicants were denied the refugee status.

The people who apply for the refugee status or for the international right of asylum in the Republic of Poland are granted social assistance. These people are mainly the inhabitants of refugee centres. In 2015 there were 11 of such centres. In that time 4,389 people were granted assistance from the Department of Foreign Affairs, 2,470 of them received benefits. The number of people who used social assistance and medical care was 14% greater than in the previous year when it equalled 3,821 people. In 2015, “the Department of Foreign Affairs spent the amount of 48,935,120.23 PLN, that is 7% more than in 2014, when it spent 45,549,551 PLN. The money was spent on:

- benefits – 20,857,700.53 PLN,
- accommodation in leased buildings: 13,153,553.33 PLN,
- health service: 11,303,335.23 PLN,
- commissioned system of feeding: 2,216,977.92 PLN.

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3 Ibid.
2. THE PARISH AS AN OPEN HOUSE FOR THE IMMIGRANTS

St John Paul II taught that the presence of immigrants is a challenge for civil authorities as well as for the believers and for Christian communities. The particular role to grant the shelter for the refugees is laid on the parish, which he perceived as a place of gathering for all the baptised. The acts of discrimination must not be present in a parish. The saint stated, “According to the etymology of the word, a parish means a place which is welcoming and open for newcomers, and it accepts everybody and does not discriminate anybody, as nobody is an alien in it. It combines the stability and security of those who live in their own home with the mobility or temporariness of the situation of those who are on the way. Where there is the sense of community of a parish which is alive, the differences between citizens of one country and foreigners disappear, because the sense of the common attachment to God, our only Father, prevails.

The mission which is common for every parish community and its meaning in the community indicate the important role of a parish which it plays in establishing bonds with foreigners, in deleting the boundaries between baptised people of different cultures and in the agreement with the followers of different religions. For the parish community, it is not the side effect activity, but the duty which is included in its institutional tasks. The sign of belonging to Catholicism is not only the brotherhood of the baptised but also: the hospitality for foreigners, regardless of their religion, rejection of all the boundaries and the manifestation of the racial discrimination, and the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of every person, which should be accompanied by the active defence of their inalienable rights.”

What is more, the document of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and the Itinerant People Receiving Christ in the refugees and the forcibly displaced. The pastoral

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4 Ibid.
guidance notes that “the place of the pastoral activity is mostly the parish which can live and pursue its vocation in a new way to make it, according to its etymology, an open home for the newcomers.” Making a parish an open home requires fulfilling several conditions, both by the priests and by the members of the parish. The most important aspects, according to Pope Francis, are “to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings in the approach to migration,” as it is not uncommon that the arrival of immigrants, refugees and the people who apply for the political asylum arouses suspicion and hostility in the local communities. The fear appears that the public safety will be threatened, that the community will lose its identity and culture, that the competition in the labour market will increase and even that new factors of crime will appear … in this respect it is necessary to change the attitude towards immigrants and refugees; passing from the defensive attitude marked by fear, lack of interest and the tendency of marginalization, which eventually corresponds to the ‘culture of rejection,’ towards the attitude based on the ‘meetings of different cultures,’ the only one which can make the world more just, fraternal, and simply better.”

The Church’s teaching results in the conclusion that the activities in parish pastoral care should differ according to the religious affiliation of the immigrants. In the pastoral care for the Catholics of a different origin, ethnic groups and languages should be treated with respect to their identity and tradition and they should be encouraged to maintain and develop their own heritage. Depending on the number of immigrants and the level of their integration within their community, the pastoral care should provide various organizational forms of the pastoral activity which is addressed to them. The communities which are in the stage of their formation and the ethnic groups or language groups which are not formed yet should be provided with the traditional missio cum cura animarum. In the pastoral care which is provided there, the importance of the relationships between the ethnic groups and the people who come from different cultures is being highlighted.

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Where the community of the immigrants constitutes a numerous group and where there is a great probability that in a community like that there can be a considerable exchange of members, it is possible to erect a personal ethno-linguistic parish or a parish of a different denomination. Such parishes include, first and foremost, young people or those who belong to the seasonal migration or who are not there to stay, as well as the immigrants who, for different reasons, have problems with the integration with the local community and with the community of the Church. There is also the possibility of the cooperation with such parishes. These are territorial parishes where one or a few priests practise the pastoral activity directed to one or several ethnic groups. Those priests are part of the pastoral team responsible for all the pastoral work in the parish.

When an immigrants’ community is spread in the area of a few parishes, it is possible to organise the pastoral care of the ethnic and language character and of the district-wide range, especially where newcomers are relatively integrated with the local community. The pastoral care which goes beyond the parish extent is indispensable considering the preservation of the immigrants’ own traditions and the various forms of piety which enrich the local community. Such parish activity leads to the opening of the way to the local community and its culture for the immigrants and, consequently, to the integration of the newcomers with the adopting community.\(^9\)

If it is not possible to establish a parish for immigrants, the local parish with the service for them, or the mission for foreigners, the pastoral service should be available for them in every Roman Catholic parish where they live, regardless of their number and the stage of integration, because they must not be left without any spiritual care or sentenced to loneliness.\(^10\) In each case, regardless of the kind of structure of the organisation, the religious formation of the immigrants is necessary and it should include different forms of preaching, especially a catechesis and liturgical formation.

The immigrants from the Eastern Catholic Church should also be provided with the pastoral care. The person responsible for providing this care is a diocesan bishop, who is supposed to delegate priests of their rite or

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Catholic priests who are properly prepared and provided with the proper authority for the clergy of the Latin rite. In case there is a larger group of Catholics of the Eastern rite, a diocesan bishop is able to establish a personal parish which will constitute a part of the Latin diocese. Such a decision to establish the Eastern rite parish requires that the diocesan bishop consults the Holy See and the right spiritual superior of the immigrants.

The aim of the priests is to care for the Eastern Catholic Church believers so that they are respected in the parish, because this leads to a better understanding of their situation in the local environment. The immigrants who belong to the Eastern Catholic Church should not feel embarrassed because of their rite or language. In case they do not have their own shrine, they can perform the liturgy in the Churches and chapels of the Latin rite, and when they do not have their own priest, they can receive the Sacraments and participate in the Roman Catholic liturgy.  

Christians who are not in the full communion with the Catholic Church should also be welcome and their admission in the parish should be treated as the service for Christ. Catholic parishioners should avoid the easy irenicism and proselytism, giving respect to the conscience of the immigrants and their religious and cultural heritage. If a diocesan bishop agrees to that, non-Catholics can use Catholic infrastructure and bury their dead in a Catholic cemetery. In the exceptional circumstances, if the spiritual good of particular immigrants requires that, they can receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. This rule applies to the non-Catholic believers of the Eastern Churches who are able to validly receive these Sacraments.

Catholics are called to show their hospitality to the immigrants who profess religions other than Christianity. The reception of foreigners with respect to their culture, religion and identity, is a testimony given to Christ and is of evangelic value. Proper dialogue with non-Christians should be marked by a respect for religious freedom. However, Catholics should be aware and convinced that “the Church is the actual way to salvation and it, as the only one, possesses the full means of salvation” (RMis, 55). “However, for us [Catholics—D.L.], it should be inalienable to proclaim in an expressive or tacit way, depending on the circumstances, the salvation in Christ, the only Mediator between God and people, to Whom we, the whole creation of the Church, head in such a way that neither a fraternal dialogue, or sharing the

11 PAPIESKA RADA COR UNUM, Przyjęcie Chrystusa w uchodźcach, sec. 92.  
12 Ibid., sec. 56-7.  
13 R. KARPIŃSKI, Wskazania pastoralne, 65.
value of the human rights diminishes the Church’s commitment to evangelisation.\textsuperscript{14}

The acceptance of non-Christians in the parish and the dialogue with them require the proper formation which should be systematically acquired by Christians. It mostly includes getting to know the doctrine and the rules of the Christian life, as well as the religion and the culture of the immigrants. This will prevent the loss of one’s identity and will allow for providing the foreigners with proper help. While presenting them the image of our country and our community in which they live, we should not show it in an unfaithful way, especially when it comes to the threats they can encounter. This particularly concerns the negative features of the European communities such as religious indifference, moral relativism, consumerism and materialism.\textsuperscript{15}

The help given to non-Christian immigrants involves sharing the sacral infrastructure of the parish in order to deepen the social bonds. This includes taking part in the common cultural activities, recreation, relax, etc. with respect to the mandatory rules concerning these places. It is not proper, however, to let the shrines and other buildings which serve the evangelical activity be used for non-Christian purposes, especially in the places where it can lead to the claims of ownership from the government.\textsuperscript{16}

3. THE FORMS OF THE PASTORAL CARE FOR THE IMMIGRANTS

Parish pastoral care should be most of all addressed to the families of immigrants. It has various aims connected with maintaining and developing marriage and family communities and with integrating it with the local society. The new situation of the families who become a part of the community which is culturally different tests the bonds between the spouses, between the parents and the children and influences the upbringing of children.\textsuperscript{17} The


\textsuperscript{16} Papieska Rada Cor Unum, Przyjęcie Chrystusa w uchodźcach, sec. 61.

change of roles of the particular family members, especially of the parents in
the new place, causes the change in the functioning of the family which
further results in loosening family bonds. The feeling of foreignness towards
the community can, however, tighten the family bonds and deepen them,
therefore parish pastoral care faces the necessity to help the immigrant fa-
milies preserve their integrity. This aim particularly concerns the families of
Christians from the Eastern Churches for whom a parish becomes a natural
environment and a community which provides them with the spiritual and
material support. It is necessary to accompany the families of the immigrants
since the beginning of their stay in a parish. Offering help is also necessary
for immigrants’ families of different religions, especially when they do not
receive any support from their own families or from the members of their
national or religious communities.

The welcoming of newcomers’ families to a parish is a precious initiative.
It usually takes place in the house of immigrants. It is either a parish priest
or his assistant or some secular member of the community who is his dele-
gate to visit newcomers. Such a visit can result in the mutual understanding
of the representatives of both groups, and in getting to know the parish and
its priests. The place of the meeting, the flat of immigrants, allows for the
lack of restraint and gives them the sense of security. The visit at newcom-
ers’ house should be well-prepared and preceded by a private call or a phone
conversation. This is both the sign of respect for newcomers’ freedom, so
that they should not feel forced, and a method of determining the aim of the
visit, its time and place.

The welcoming of newcomers begins the process of pastoral activity for
the family, according to the recognised needs. These are often existential
needs which can, at least partly, be satisfied by the parish Caritas group. This
group can also assist in dealing with various administrative matters, in health
centres, schools and other public institutions. Pastoral work can also help
immigrants solve problems with the relationships in families. In such cases
immigrants are advised to go to the parish or the specialist family coun-
selling centres. In any case, the pastoral activity should begin with the first
visit so that the family may receive support in the fields of the family in-
tegration within the parish and the local community.

The aim of parish pastoral care is to take care of young people. The aim
of the care is to support the religious, cultural and social development of

Benedict XVI, “Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Migranta i Uchodźcy 2006 r.,” Polish edition
of L’Osservatore Romano 26(2005), 3: 7-8.
young immigrants. Where it is necessary, they should be helped in finding a proper school which will suit the needs, possibilities and interests of young people. In many cases material and organisational help may also be necessary for the parents of a student so that he or she could have a good start at school.

Regardless of the ethnic and religious affiliation, the support of the cultural and social fields is necessary. Young immigrants should be able to meet one another and their Polish peers. Therefore, it is necessary to create clubs and other places of this kind in the parish where they could meet. Such conditions encourage mutual understanding, meeting of other young people, spending free time and developing their education. Parish libraries are also a place where they can develop culturally.

Priests and secular parishioners who are engaged in parish pastoral care should encourage the children of immigrants to take part in such parish initiatives as: trips, games, discos, parish picnics, summer camps, winter camps, etc. Engaging them into diverse forms of the parish activity should lead to their deeper integration with the local community of peers. Immigrants cannot be the only recipients of parish initiatives, but they should also be involved in the active participation for the common good. In such a way, they can develop their own skills, thanks to which the problem of marginalisation can be reduced.

The immigrants who came alone, without their families, to earn money, to learn, to study or to be medically treated require different kinds of approach. Their stay is relatively short. They usually do not consider the country of immigration to be their destination and the place to stay. Such immigrants should be provided with such pastoral help which is adequate for their needs. In the case of students or pupils, it means engaging them in academic ministry; and for those who are medically treated, there is the pastoral care of the sick. Young people and those who are sick should always be involved into parish pastoral care which is adapted to their needs and their place of living. The parish is in fact the basic place for the meeting of people with God, immigrants included. It is in the parish where the Word of God should be proclaimed in the language which is understandable to them, where the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, should be performed, where the service of love is addressed to them. Within the parish, the immigrants who come

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
from one country or are of the same nationality should be able to meet for the mutual integration, maintaining the national, cultural and religious identity and for the mutual help.

In the process of integration of immigrants, parish associations play an important role. Many of them work in small groups. This promotes maintaining direct relationships between the members of the associations, thanks to which they can satisfy their need of the spiritual support. Religious associations, depending on their charism, promote deepening the bond with God and the development of their religious life, engaging in the apostolate, as well as the social, cultural and the charitable undertakings. They are also the place of religious and social integration. Integrating immigrants within small communities prepares them for the participation in the life of local and state communities. Movements, associations and small religious groups enable the meeting of the immigrants and the hosts on the religious and cultural bases, which promotes understanding of the customs of both societies and, as a result, provides the mutual enrichment.

The important role in the process of integration of immigrants is to be played by the community structures of a parish, especially the parish pastoral council and the parish Caritas group. The aim of parish pastoral council is to support the parish priest in taking decisions and fulfilling his pastoral tasks. The initiatives aimed at immigrants include the council’s task to collect data which concern the existential and religious conditions of the immigrants and its evaluation. This assessment results in undertaking the initiatives adequate to the existing needs of the immigrants and their implementation.

The activity of the parish pastoral council members for the integration of immigrants is also addressed to the entire community of parishioners. This particularly concerns the formation of the faithful which includes warning them of the dangers connected with the arrival of immigrants, such as violence, illnesses, drugs, etc. as well as informing them about the possibility of the occurrence of misunderstandings which are caused by the cultural differences or the tensions which they result in. The formation of the parishioners

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22 See Adam SCHULZ, “Ruchy i stowarzyszenia katolickie środowiskiem formacji i dzia-
kowski (Poznań, 2007), 213-16.


24 Cf. Dariusz LIPIEC, “Rola Parafialnej Rady Duszpasterskiej w budowaniu wspólnoty para-
also involves shaping the attitudes of hospitality, openness and respect for
the newcomers, for their identity and dissimilarity.\textsuperscript{25}

The specific activity for the immigrants is undertaken by the parish Caritas
group. Its aim is to provide material, psychological and spiritual help,
which is based on Christian brotherly love.\textsuperscript{26} In cooperation with the parish
pastoral council, the volunteers of the Caritas group assess the needs of im-
migrants and then, in consultation with the parish priest, they take actions to
satisfy them. Due to the fact that the specific character and the dimension of
the needs of the newcomers may exceed the capacity of the parish, the parish
Caritas group cooperates with state institutions, with the local authorities
and social institutions which possess appropriate personnel, and social and
material facilities to effectively help the immigrants.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Poland is not a country chosen by many immigrants as a place for settle-
ment. This is mostly caused by the economic condition of the country. Nev-
evertheless, the number of incoming immigrants, who come to the country for
different reasons, has been increasing. Their activity is noticeable not only in
big cities but also in smaller clusters of people. The presence of immigrants
is a challenge for the local communities in which immigrants live and for the
parishes as the local communities of the Church. The parish is by nature
predestined to welcome guests and to show them its hospitality. The most
precious gift it can give the guests is the Gospel of salvation accomplished
in Jesus Christ. While respecting the freedom and identity of newcomers,
a parish is supposed to bring them to Him.

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\textsuperscript{26} Cf. Wiesław Przygoda, \textit{Apostolski wymiar wolontariatu charytatywnego w Polsce} (Lublin: TN KUL, 2012), 13-14.


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