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The pastoral care of people with visual impairment in Poland. Contemporary problems and challenges

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Abstract

The pastoral care of people with visual impairment in Poland. Contemporary problems and challenges

The social and cultural as well as religious ongoing transformations in the Polish society influence the activity of the extraordinary pastoral care of people with visual impairment. The transformations cause various problems and challenges which the pastoral care has to face. Integration processes result in the fact that at the diocesan level more and more of the blind or visually impaired people satisfy their religious needs within the parish pastoral care and fewer of them use the special pastoral care which is addressed for them specifically. What is more, the secularization of the society results in the decrease of the number of people with disabilities who maintain their religious practice. It particularly concerns young people. The employment of priests who would be able to work for the pastoral care of people with visual impairment is a real challenge. The employment rate in this pastoral care is relatively low. Furthermore, the organization and coordination of the nationwide events becomes more and more challenging. The current problems and challenges in the centres for the blind children, teens and adults mainly result from the constantly changing state legislation. They mainly concern the possibility of engaging priests into the lives of their residents.

Keywords: pastoral care, disability, visual impairment

Abstrakt

Duszpasterstwo osób z niepełnosprawnością wzroku w Polsce. Współczesne problemy i wyzwania

Zmiany społeczno-kulturowe i religijne zachodzące w społeczeństwie polskim mają wpływ na działalność nadzwyczajnego duszpasterstwa osób z uszkodzonym wzrokiem. Powodują one różnorakie problemy i wyzwania, którym duszpasterstwo to musi wychodzić naprzeciw. Procesy integracyjne sprawiają, że na płaszczyźnie diecezjalnej coraz więcej osób niewidomych i słabowidzących zaspokaja swoje potrzeby religijne w ramach duszpasterstwa parafialnego, a coraz mniej korzysta z dedykowanego im duszpasterstwa specjalnego. Także laicyzacja społeczeństwa sprawia, że zmniejsza się liczba ludzi z niepełnosprawnością podtrzymujących praktyki religijne. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza ludzi młodych. Wyzwaniem dla duszpasterstwa osób z niepełnosprawnością wzroku jest pozyskiwanie duchownych do tej pracy. Na płaszczyźnie ogólnopolskiej dużym wyzwaniem jest formacja duszpasterzy. Korzysta z niej stosunkowo niewielki odsetek duchownych. Coraz większym wyzwaniem jest także organizowanie i koordynacja inicjatyw o charakterze ogólnopolskim. W ośrodkach

dla niewidomych dzieci, młodzieży i dorosłych współczesne wyzwania i problemy wynikają głównie ze zmieniającego się prawodawstwa państwowego, które wpływa na możliwości zaangażowania duchownych w życie mieszkańców tych placówek.

Słowa kluczowe: duszpasterstwo, niepełnosprawność, niepełnosprawność widzenia

The pastoral care of people with visual impairment is an organized salvific institution of the Church which in the service to such people realizes the salvific work of Christ through proclaiming God's Word, ministering sacraments, prayer, pastoral ministry and giving the testimony of the Christian life. Its fundamental aim is to revive the religious life of the people who suffer from visual impairment and the social environment in which they live. It is particularly important to lead such people into understanding of the salvific role of suffering and into finding a proper attitude towards life. Another important aim of the pastoral care of people with visual impairment is to shape proper attitudes of the environment towards such people, based on the motivation of the Good News.¹

In the current organizational form the pastoral care of people with visual impairment in Poland was established on March 17, 1959 by the Polish Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński under the name Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych [the National Pastoral Care of the Blind]. Its headquarters was the convent of Zgromadzenie Sióstr Franciszkanek Służebnic Krzyża przy kościele Świętego Marcina [the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross at St. Martin's church] in Warsaw.² This is also the headquarters of the centre of this pastoral care in the Archdiocese of Warsaw. The people who work in this centre serve in the ministry in the archdiocese.

The pastoral care of people with visual impairment is mainly realized in three areas: at the national level, at the diocesan level and in the centres for such people. At the national level it focuses mainly on organizing and coordinating the nationwide events. It involves running a library of

1 Cf. M. Fiałkowski, *Niewidomych duszpasterstwo*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, eds. R. Kamiński, W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski, Lublin 2006, p. 573.

2 An appointment letter of rev. Tadeusz Fedorowicz for the office of National Chaplain of the Blind, Warsaw, Mar 16, 1959, the copy in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw.

books printed in Braille and audiobooks, organizing retreats, pilgrimages and holidays for people with disabilities from the whole country as well as organizing formational meetings for diocesan priests and for other clergymen and laymen who are engaged into the pastoral ministry.

At the diocesan level the pastoral care is run by the priests from the pastoral care of the blind who are appointed by diocesan bishops. Their activity focuses on the formational meetings organized systematically or occasionally, as well as on the nationwide, diocesan or local pilgrimages.³ The pastoral care for the people with visual impairment is diverse. Other pastoral forms are realized in the centres for children and young people and focus mainly on the catechesis while others are addressed for adults, in particular for the elderly who live in the senior homes.

The aim of this article is to present and analyse the most important current challenges and problems faced by the extraordinary pastoral care of people with visual impairment. The article is based on the archival documents of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych [the National Pastoral Care of the Blind]. The Author also used certain scientific and popular studies which concern the pastoral activity addressed for the visually impaired people. The source material required using the following research methods: the method of source analysis and the method of the content analysis. The other methods include the elements of the comparative method and of the historical-critical method.

1. The problems and challenges at the diocesan level

The decreasing number of people with visual impairment who are engaged into this type of extraordinary pastoral care can be perceived as the basic challenge for the pastoral care. It mainly results from the contemporary integration trends. Many people suffering from serious visual impairment do not want to be perceived as disabled. They assess their situation as worse and perceive themselves as “worse” than the able-bodied people. This also concerns a number of disabled children who are perceived as worse by their parents. It affects the parents’ decisions to enrol the child in a public school in the integrated school classes,

³ T. Fedorowicz, *Duszpasterstwo niewidomych. Założenia i wnioski*, Warszawa 1959 [the manuscript in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw].

even in case of a child with a significant degree of disability, even though it would more suitable for the child to be enrolled to an educational care centre addressed for the pupils with certain kinds of disability. Many adults with eyesight disabilities and many parents of children with such disabilities have so far avoided contact with the pastoral care of the blind. If, however, they decided to participate in the pastoral care, they mainly expected certain measurable results of their engagement. Currently their expectations concern such pastoral initiatives which would satisfy their certain needs. These include not only their religious needs but also the ones concerning spending their free time, material support etc.

One of the results of the integration processes of people with disabilities is their departure from the previously existing organizations which are addressed for them. In case of the organizations which include the blind and the visually impaired, we notice the reluctance of young people to join them. It is partly caused by replacing of the previous offer with new ones. Audiobooks are replaced by e-books which do not have to be borrowed from libraries, as it is connected with ordering and waiting for the parcel—the process can be prolonged if the chosen book had been borrowed. There is also decrease in the demand for literary works printed in Braille because not all young people know and use it. Similarly, phone apps, computer programmes as well as various social initiatives replaced the offers of the organizations for the blind and for the visually impaired.

The membership of the visually impaired in the organizations addressed for them gives them a sense of belonging and satisfies their various psychological needs. Young blind and visually impaired people, similarly to their able-bodied peers, follow modern trends which aim at individualization and privatization of life. This results in the situation in which such organizations gather fewer and fewer young people and thus the average age of the members of local groups increases noticeably.⁴

In a similar way, the results of integration processes regard the Catholic Church and the pastoral care of people with visual impairment. Young people are not eager to get engaged into the pastoral care of the

4 Cf. M. Fiałkowski, *Rola zrzeczeń religijnych we wspólnotowym towarzystwie młodzieży w rozwoju wiary*, in: *Duszpasterstwo młodzieży w Polsce wobec współczesnych przemian*, eds. P. Ochotny, M. J. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Warszawa 2018, pp. 243–245.

blind. They do not want to be perceived through their disability and so they avoid the communities addressed for them. They prefer to receive sacraments in the ordinary pastoral care and to participate in the Holy Mass and in the pilgrimages the same way⁵ Moreover, young visually impaired people are less eager to be in a community of their disabled peers. They rather prefer to be with able-bodied people and to feel like them. It is not insignificant that the extraordinary pastoral care of the visually impaired gathers more elderly and middle-aged people who were brought up in a different social, cultural and religious environment. In the Church and in their pastoral care such people found the possibility to satisfy their religious, social and psychological needs. They cherish the social dimension of religiosity and experiencing it in the community of their peers. Different expectations of young visually impaired people constitute a problem in the communication with other people from other generations and in building a community with them.⁶

Another reason of the decreased interest of young visually impaired people in the pastoral care addressed for them is the decreased interest in religiosity in this generation as well as the trend for privatisation of religiosity. It results in the decreased percentage of young blind and visually impaired people undertaking religious practices.⁷ What is more, the percentage of people who seek answers to their existential questions in religion is also lower, including the questions regarding disability, its meaning and significance, while more and more of them seek answers in ideologies offered by the cultural mainstream.⁸

5 Cf. Protokół spotkania duszpasterzy niewidomych i niedowidzących [the protocol from the meeting of priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind and the Visually Impaired], Poznań, April 14–16, 2015, the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw.

6 Various ways of gaining the interest of young visually impaired people in religious issues are taken into consideration, including the use of contemporary media. Cf. The report [from the meeting of priests of the pastoral care of the blind], Warszawa, Sep 26, 2019 [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw].

7 Cf. K. Świąś, Społeczne i religijne uwarunkowania duszpasterstwa w Polsce, in: *Duszpasterstwo w Polsce. 50 lat inspiracji Soboru Watykańskiego II*, ed. M. Fiałkowski, Lublin 2015, pp. 20–31.

8 Cf. J. Placha, Wartość religii w budowaniu kultury pedagogicznej. W poszukiwaniu kulturowej tożsamości w najtrudniejszych latach doświadczeń, „Laski” 27 (2021) nr 1–2,

Some other challenge for the pastoral care of people with visual impairment at the diocesan level is how to gain new priests. The problem of gaining new priests is not new and has been present in various aspects for decades.⁹ It resulted from the lack of priests eager to minister in the environment of the blind and of the visually impaired and thus the Church authorities delegated priests to this ministry almost coincidentally. They called priests who were not prepared for this kind of ministry, who were not equipped with proper natural abilities or charisms. It was a real challenge for the priests of the pastoral care for the blind and visually impaired to combine this ministry with other pastoral tasks which often consisted in many domains of the special and specialist pastoral care. The multitude of various tasks resulted in the deterioration of the quality of their ministry and often in the deterioration of the health condition of the priests. What is more, the formation of priests was also a problem as not all of them realized the need to improve their competences.¹⁰

The previous challenges connected with gaining priests have now become even more intense. It mainly results from the decreasing number of candidates for priesthood and of young priests. The circles of pastoral care for the blind existing in some diocesan seminaries and monasteries have ceased to function because the small number of alumni does not allow for engaging into all the pastoral initiatives. What is more, the seminary authorities, taking into account the limited amount of time of the clerics and the needs of the diocesan or monastery pastoral care, limit the number of pastoral initiatives in which they are allowed to get engaged systematically. It limits the possibility to develop the interests and charisms of the alumni which concern working with people with disabilities. Thus there are fewer and fewer of pastoral care of the blind priests who are well-prepared, at least preliminarily, for the work in this environment.

pp. 59–61.

9 Cf. B. Pawłowicz, *Dialog duszpasterski z niewidomymi*, „Homo Dei” 46 (1977) nr 4, pp. 276–280.

10 Cf. B. Z. Pawłowicz, *Duszpasterstwo niewidomych*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 76 (1984) z. 1, pp. 98–102.

The problems and challenges mentioned above, which regard the formation and ministry of priests for the pastoral care for the people with visual impairment are still present and they are similar in characteristics. The work with the blind is still performed by priests who have never meant to work with such people and who are forced to combine this work with other kinds of pastoral care.¹¹ They are often forced to combine various activities of the spiritual kind which are quite frequently very distant from one another as far as the problematics is concerned. Being burdened with too many duties results in the fact that their ministry for the people with disabilities is limited only to the necessary initiatives, excluding the others. What is more, not all of them undergo a formation which is necessary for the development of their competences.

As a result of that, the number of the pastoral initiatives undertaken at the diocesan level is diminishing. The number of systematic formation meetings also decreases, the occasional meetings do not take place on a regular basis—e.g. Christmas waffle-sharing meetings or the egg-sharing Easter meetings—and no other new forms of cooperation are undertaken, the ones which would reflect and satisfy the current needs of the faithful. The meetings sometimes tend to be formalized and seem to be held in haste. The priests undertake the forms of individual pastoral care, using as an excuse the lack of time for the conversations with the disabled. All these problems result in the fact that fewer and fewer blind and visually impaired people come to these meetings. What is more, fewer of them seek contact with the delegated priests. The religious needs of the visually impaired people, out of choice or necessity, are mainly realized in parishes, using the ministry of priests who not always understand the specific nature of the disabled's religious and existential needs.¹²

2. The nationwide problems and challenges

The challenges at the diocesan level which result from the diminishing number of the disabled who participate in the activity of the pastoral

11 Cf. J. Szcześniak, *Duszpasterstwo osób niepełnosprawnych*, „Laski” 16 (2010) nr 3–4, pp. 20–23.

12 Cf. H. Pasterny, *Osoba niepełnosprawna w Kościele*, „Laski” 24 (2018) nr 1–2, pp. 52–53.

care of people with visual impairment and the personal problems are reflected at the nationwide level. The first challenge, but not the most important one, is the formation of priests. The national pastoral care of the blind priest leads such formation initiatives and they involve all the dimensions of the priestly formation. Retreats are organized for the clergy, for the consecrated persons and for the laymen in places connected with the visually impaired people and in shrines throughout the country.¹³ Pastoral meetings are organized which aim at discussing the current pastoral situation and at planning further initiatives, as well as the intellectual and pastoral formation of the clergy. The places for these meetings are carefully selected, they include ecclesial and secular institutions connected with the blind and visually impaired, such as the care and education centres, rehabilitation centres or visually impaired people's homes. However, only few blind people take part in such formative pastoral meetings. Their number has recently fluctuated round 15.¹⁴ It should be noticed that each diocese should have an appointed diocesan pastoral care priest, and moreover, there are a few other pastoral centres in several dioceses.

¹³ Cf. Protokół [ze spotkania duszpasterzy niewidomych] [the protocol from the meeting of priests of the pastoral care of the blind], Chełmno, Sep 14, 2013, the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw.

¹⁴ The exact number of the pastoral care priests who participate in the meetings in particular years is difficult to determine because the reports do not always contain such information. In 2021 15 pastoral care priests participated in the meetings. – Sprawozdanie ze spotkania duszpasterzy niewidomych [Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind], Apr 12–15, 2021, in the retreat home in Łaski [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw]. The number has not significantly changed since the previous decades. In 2006 there were 14 priests participating – Protokół z Ogólnopolskiego Spotkania Duszpasterzy Osób Niewidomych i Niedowidzących [the Protocol from the Nationwide Meeting of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind and Visually Impaired], Wrocław, Apr 24, 2006 [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw]; in 2008–16 priests – Protokół z Ogólnopolskiego Spotkania Duszpasterzy Osób Niewidomych i Niedowidzących [the Protocol from the Nationwide Meeting of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind and Visually Impaired], Bydgoszcz, Mar 31, 2008 [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw]; in 2011–18 priests – Sprawozdanie ze Zjazdu Duszpasterzy Osób Niewidomych [the report from the Congress of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind], Łomża, Sep 10, 2011 [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw].

The lack of engagement of some local pastoral care priests in the work of the Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych [the National Pastoral Care of the Blind] has various results. One of them is the absence of people with disabilities in the centres run by the priests in the nationwide pastoral initiatives. Among the most important of the initiatives there is the nationwide pilgrimage of the blind to one of the sanctuaries in Poland¹⁵ which takes place every two years. Some of the pastoral centres are represented in large numbers, some of them are represented by a few blind people and some of them come without their priests. Similarly, it regards other pastoral forms gathering the disabled from the selected local centres.

Another result of the absence of some pastoral care priests in the formation at the nationwide level is their relatively lower level of engagement into the works in their environment. We can claim that the activity of the pastoral care priests at the diocesan level resembles approximately the participation in the formation at the nationwide level. The most engaged pastoral care priests seek to develop their own typhological competences. They also care for the development of such competences of their co-workers: clerics, confreres and the laymen. The presence of the co-workers at the formation meetings is less numerous.¹⁶

The care for people with coupled disabilities is also a challenge of the pastoral care of the people with visual impairment. The systematic work with the deaf-mute take place only in a few pastoral care centres, among them the best developed one is in the centre of the Archdiocese of Warsaw which is the headquarters of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych. There are difficulties in gaining priests who are capable to use the techniques to communicate with such disabled people and thus also in initiating and systematic running of at least some selected pastoral initiatives.

A similar challenge is posed by the development of the pastoral care of visually impaired people who at the same time suffer from the intellectual disability. The pastoral care of such people is mainly the individual

¹⁵ Cf. Sprawozdanie ze spotkania duszpasterzy niewidomych [the report from the Congress of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind], Łowicz, Sep 12, 2015 [the original version in the archives of Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych in Warsaw].

¹⁶ Cf. H. Pasterny, *Osoba niepełnosprawna w Kościele*, „Laski” 24 (2018) nr 1–2, p. 50.

pastoral care. Work with such people is done either by the pastoral care of the blind priests or by the pastoral care of the intellectual disabilities priests, depending on the environment with which they are connected.¹⁷

It is a challenge for the contemporary pastoral care for the visually impaired people to cooperate with social organizations and with institutions which work for the disabled. Since the beginning *Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych* has been connected with *Zgromadzenie Sióstr Franciszkanek Służebnic Krzyża* [the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross] and their monastery in Warsaw is their headquarters.¹⁸ The pastoral care of the blind also uses the centre in Laski near Warsaw where they conduct retreats for the blind and for pastoral care priests, as well as the centre in Sobieszewo which offers camps for the blind, and the centre in Rabka where the formation and pastoral meetings took place. Similarly, since its beginning, the KDN cooperates with *Towarzystwo Opieki nad Ociemniałymi* [The Society for the Care of the Blind] in Laski, which was established by, like the Franciscan Sisters, the Blessed Elżbieta Róża Czacka. The pastoral care can always rely on the support of the association and of TOnO.¹⁹

The challenges are also connected with the cooperation with the non-ecclesial entities. For many years the cooperation with *Polski Związek Niewidomych* [The Polish Association of the Blind] was very fruitful for KDN.²⁰ The problems which resulted from the systemic transformation which PZN is constantly experiencing, affect the cooperation. It cannot satisfy the needs of KDN to such an extent and in such

17 Cf. Protokół Ogólnopolskiego Spotkania Duszpasterzy Osób Niewidomych i Niedowidzących [the protocol from the Meeting of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind and of the Visually Impaired], Częstochowa, Apr 19–22, 2009 [the original version in the archives of *Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych* in Warsaw].

18 The letter of bishop Zdzisław Goliński to sister Benedykta Woyczyńska, general superior of SFSK, Częstochowa, Mar 29, 1958 [the copy in the archives of *Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych* in Warsaw].

19 Cf. Protokół z Ogólnopolskiego Spotkania Duszpasterzy Osób Niewidomych i Niedowidzących [the protocol from the Nationwide Meeting of Priests of the Pastoral Care of the Blind and of the Visually Impaired], Warsaw, Apr 16, 2007 [the original version in the archives of *Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych* in Warsaw].

20 Cf. Notatka ze zjazdu duszpasterzy niewidomych [note from the congress of priests of the pastoral care of the blind], Laski, Apr 18–20, 2012 [the original version in the archives of *Krajowe Duszpasterstwo Niewidomych* in Warsaw].

a way as is required by PZN in this cooperation. The legal situation and the organizational condition of PZN in some situations make it difficult to undertake such initiatives to the required extent as it is effective for the visually impaired people.

Furthermore, PZN struggles with the problem of diminishing of the number of members, especially due to the lack of young people who distance themselves from the environment of people with disabilities, which results, among others, from the integration processes. However, the main most disadvantaged parties in the difficult cooperation between the pastoral care of the blind and PZN are the pastoral care centres. Due to this cooperation, the pastoral care priests established contacts with people with disabilities and with their families and they got to know the local environments of such people. In many centres the cooperation in the realization of various religious and social initiatives was practiced on a daily basis. In the current situation it is a great challenge to get to the pastoral care of the blind and visually impaired people priests and to make them interested in the community activity.

3. Problems and challenges in the centres of the people with visual impairment

In Poland there are several types of centres for people with visual impairment. There are educational and care centres for the blind children and young, a rehabilitation centre and training courses for adults and senior homes for the visually impaired. Every type of the centre is specific due to its aims and the age and needs of the people who they are addressed for. All of the centres addressed for people with visual impairment realize the pastoral care which has its own specific problems. Contemporary challenges mainly result from the legal transformations which concern these centres as well as the situation of the Catholic Church and Her pastoral care. The cultural transformations in the Polish society which also influence people with disabilities, are also significant here.²¹

²¹ Cf. P. Staniszewska-Pobikrowska, *Religia w szkole w polskim systemie prawnym, in: Duszpasterstwo młodzieży w Polsce wobec współczesnych przemian*, eds. P. Ochotny, M. J. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Warszawa 2018, pp. 295–316.

The transformation connected with the legal status of teaching religious education at school seems to be the most significant challenge for the pastoral care in the care and educational centres.²² In the centres the pastoral activity of the Church is focused on teaching religious education. The teachers of religious education are also engaged into various kinds of activities at schools. Apart from their so called “obligatory activities” commissioned by the school headmaster, such as the commemorative performances, stagings, assemblies and other similar events connected with celebrating Christmas, Easter and other religious holidays, the catechists run various circles of interests of religious themes. The catechists animate and run the school stages of religious knowledge competitions. They prepare students for receiving sacraments and sometimes they bring the students to church enabling their participation in the Holy Mass.

Pastoral care faces the challenges connected with the decrease of the number of religious education or even with removing religious education from schools. In the most radical form the changes could lead to the complete absence of the clergy or secular teachers of religious education thus depriving the disabled young people of the pastoral care. In case of religious education teachers this removal can be particularly severe because the younger and less self-reliant disabled who are dependent on the help of others would not be able to participate in the parish pastoral care. Even such essential religious needs of students as preparation for the sacraments, can depend on the good will of the management of the centres which cooperate or do not cooperate with parishes.

Such problems may not occur in case of the centres which are run by institutions connected with the Catholic Church. However, also in these institutions the opinion of parents who may not allow their children to participate in religious education classes because their children are too burdened with other classes or it is currently trendy and culturally

²² While this article was being written, there have been ongoing legal transformations regarding teaching religious education at school. Discussions mainly regard the number of classes of religious education per week and financing the teachers of religious education. They also involve the issues of: the status of the teachers of religious education at school, the status of the final evaluation of religious education and putting the evaluation marks on the school certificate etc.

trendy not to participate. Such decisions of parents are also a challenge for the pastoral care in other centres for children and young people. In the future they can also be intensified.

Other types of challenges result from the processes of laicization which are taking place in the Polish society. Assuming of the attitudes of individualism and consumerism by some part of the society is reflected in the dropping out of religious education lessons, which is also noticeable in case of the activity of parents who have visually impaired children.

The pastoral care of people with visual impairment in the senior homes faces different challenges. The pastoral care realized there is not subjected to such fast and radical changes as the one in the centres for children and young people. The pastoral care of seniors is run by chaplains who are equipped with developed forms and methods of activity. Their stability in running the pastoral ministry results from the religious needs of residents which are constant and specific for the elderly.²³ A new challenge is connected with entering the senior age of a greater number of people who have been brought up in the non-Catholic tradition and who experience their disability in the world of values and hierarchy far from the Christian tradition. Such people distance themselves from the Church to different extents, sometimes they assume the attitude of aggression. The pastoral care for seniors requires to a greater extent the properly prepared chaplains. They are required not only to be equipped with the knowledge of typhology and gerontology but also the knowledge of contemporary cultural and religious transformations which regard the Polish society.²⁴

Conclusion

The Author of the article indicates the most important problems and challenges which the extraordinary pastoral care for people with visual

²³ Cf. R. Sawicki, *Dom Pomocy Społecznej „Misericordia” Caritas Diecezji Ełckiej jako forma troski Kościoła o osoby w podeszłym wieku*, in: *Seniorzy wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce*, eds. M. J. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Warszawa 2019, pp. 311–314.

²⁴ Cf. D. Lipiec, *Duszpasterstwo niewidomych i słabowidzących w Polsce. Studium teologicznopastoralne*, Lublin 2011, pp. 324–336.

impairment face, and emphasises the fundamental ways to cope with them. Indicating a greater number of challenges and difficulties and the thorough analysis of them extend the limits of this dissertation. These challenges mainly result from the ongoing transformations of the Polish society. These changes are complex and they influence various fields of social life. The secularisation processes affect each individual citizen and they enhance removing religious education from the state and social institutions as well as from the life of the citizens. In education, also in the specialist education, they are reflected in the legislative initiatives which aim at removing teaching of religious education or at least at limiting it. The bottom-up effect of the secularisation processes is reflected in withdrawing children from the religious education classes by the parents or by themselves when they turn 18. However, it should be noted that such decisions are often caused by conformity and not by ideological considerations. Libertarian slogans are often used to justify the previously taken decisions. Referring to the libertarian theories is also practiced by adults with disabilities who live in the specialist centres. It is rather connected with entering the senior age of people who had been brought up in non-Catholic traditions.

Striving for the holistic integration of the visually impaired people is generally considered positive. It seems to be a chance for the full empowerment of such people in the social life. However it also has some negative effects. They are mainly connected with the lack of preparation of the blind and of the visually impaired for the active participation in the good, positive life. As a result of it, they lack the ability of the independence in coping with their professional and family, public or religious life. Such people often assume attitudes of entitlement.

For the extraordinary pastoral care of the visually impaired, striving for integration means departure of such people from the way the Church's ministry in satisfying these needs and seeking to satisfy religious needs within the ordinary pastoral care in parishes. In the properly conducted rehabilitation and revalidatory processes, which genuinely result in the proper integration of the blind and visually impaired, the pastoral care of the visually impaired can in the future become redundant in the current form. Its presence may be required only at the stage of preparation of the disabled for the independent life. However,

the reality indicates that the number of people who are unable to use the parish pastoral care in its full extent is quite numerous. This means the necessity to maintain the extraordinary pastoral care for people with visual impairment. The pastoral care priests are therefore expected to adapt the forms and methods of their pastoral ministry to the current challenges. The significant challenge is to seek blind and visually impaired people and to present them the pastoral offer and its benefits in their lives.

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