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## Contemporary conditions of pastoral conversation in Poland

The article presents the most important contemporary conditions of pastoral conversation which is a form of individual pastoral care in Poland. Because of the fast ongoing social, cultural and religious changes in the Polish society, more and more faithful ask priests for pastoral conversation because they cannot find satisfying answers to their existential and religious questions in universal pastoral care. The first part of the article is meant to define pastoral conversation as a form of pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church in Poland. The next part describes new religious conditions of pastoral conversation as well as the current existential conditions of this form of pastoral care. The final part indicates the weak points of the preparation for pastoral ministry and of pastoral ministry itself which significantly impede the effectiveness of pastoral conversation and limit its support to those who need it.

**Key words:** pastoral conversation, individual pastoral care, the Catholic Church, the Church in Poland, conditions of pastoral care.

The ongoing social and political changes which have been taking place in Poland since 1989 cause changes of religiousness of the Polish society and result in the necessity to introduce changes in the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church. The imposed laicisation introduced by the communist authorities was combined with the secularisation currents from the Western Europe and from America. It resulted in the ongoing popularisation of liberal attitudes in various spheres of life, especially in the sphere of marriage and family life and in the public sphere. The emphasis is put on eliminating the Christian outlook and the hierarchy of values. As a result of laicisation, Christians and Catholics face various dilemmas in their religious and everyday

life. The faithful face new unknown phenomena which they must get to know and appraise. However, the full acknowledgement and appraisal of them is often difficult because they are shown and appraised only from the secular point of view. The faithful seek help and the answers to many existential questions in the Church. They still want to live their lives based on God's Revelation and on the Christian perception of the world.

Pastoral activity of the Catholic Church in Poland is mainly realized on the basis of ordinary pastoral care which is mainly addressed to all the faithful and which is realized in parishes. Homily preaching is addressed to all parishioners, therefore, it is universal in nature. Children and young people are educated through catechesis, however, the catechesis for adults is poorly developed. Various dilemmas and doubts of Catholics not always find solutions, and the questions which they ask cannot always be answered in the light of universal pastoral care. The individualization of life of contemporary Polish people results in the fact that life conditions of particular people vary and become more specific for each person. Such life conditions do not allow universal pastoral care to satisfy their needs and this leads to introducing individual pastoral care on a greater scale.

## Pastoral conversation as a form of pastoral care

Pastoral theology enumerates pastoral conversation as a form of the extraordinary individual pastoral care<sup>1</sup> (Kamiński, 2002). It is

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an interpersonal meeting during which the priest and the other interlocutor exchange thoughts, opinions, values and convictions; which in the closer and further perspective is directed at spiritual and religious values. Pastoral conversation consists of two levels: the supernatural, which is of greater importance, and the psychological one, which is conditioned by the features of the priest and of his interlocutor and by the method of conducting the conversation. Therefore, pastoral conversation combines human experience and religious experience<sup>2</sup>.

The presence of existential experience in pastoral conversation makes it resemble a psychotherapy. It results from the fact that it is conducted at three levels: at the supernatural level, as an interpersonal meeting of the seeking man with the priest and at the emotional level.

<sup>1</sup> R. Kamiński, *Duszpasterstwo nadzwyczajne*, in: *Teologia pastoralna*, vol. 2, ed. R. Kamiński, Lublin 2002, pp. 309-313.

<sup>2</sup> A. Tomkiewicz, *Rozmowa duszpasterska*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, ed. R. Kamiński, W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski, Lublin 2006, pp. 749-752.

The supernatural level, that is the religious level, is basic for pastoral conversation because it is the level of the meeting with God in faith. While the level of the interpersonal meeting of the seeking man with the priest is a conscious dialogue which is conditioned by the personality features of both interlocutors. The emotional level exists beyond the consciousness of the interlocutors.

Pastoral conversation, the model of which is most often implemented in Poland, resembles a psychotherapy in the humanist current mainly represented by C. Rogers. Although pastoral conversation is not the same as a therapy, they share some common elements. Both of these kinds of aid to the man underline the importance of the man and both aim at creating proper conditions for accepting and realization of higher values. Pastoral conversation resembles the Rogerian type of therapy also due to the fact that it takes place in the atmosphere of total trust. Both pastoral conversation and the Rogerian therapy aim at understanding the spiritual and psychological condition of the seeking man.

Despite the similarities there are also differences between pastoral conversation and psychotherapy. In his acting the therapist is limited to the level of the natural while the priest also refers to the supernatural power. The means used by the priest are both from the natural and the supernatural sources: these include the Word of God and the sacraments. What is more, the priest refers to religious motivation and he does not aim at conducting psychological analysis of the personality of the seeking person but he stresses his relationship with God and with the Church<sup>3</sup>.

Catholics in Poland ask a priest for help rather than going to a therapist. It mainly results from the authority that priests in Poland possess. The faithful wish to solve their problem in the religious context: in accordance with the principles of Christian faith and ethics and with the help of supernatural means. The faithful want to live their lives in accordance with their religion. These two realities are inseparable for many Christians. A psychologist acts on the basis of the natural means and methods, strictly psychological ones, which, according to those who ask for the help of priests, are not sufficient to provide effective holistic aid<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> H. Krzysteczko, *Poradnictwo duszpasterskie. Teoria i praktyka rogeriańskiego kontaktu pomocnego*, Katowice 1998.

<sup>4</sup> H. Weiß, *Duszpasterstwo, superwizja, psychologia pastoralna. Wprowadzenie*, Dziegielów 2012.

In the majority of cases it is the person in need who initializes pastoral conversation. He starts the conversation with a priest because of the reasons which result from his life conditions<sup>5</sup>. He wants to solve his problems with the religious means, entrusting himself to a priest who is the representative of religion. Religious context represented by the priest is conducive for creating conditions that will enable the man to open himself and to realize his personal and religious maturity. Pastoral conversation begins with presenting the problem of the man who seeks aid. The priest directs it, by means of psychological, subjective, religious and emotional factors, towards the meeting with healing God and directs it towards deepening the bond with Him<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of pastoral conversation is conditioned by the features of the priest. He is required to be sympathetic, congruent and to show unconditioned acceptance of the interlocutor. According to C. Rogers and his students, the attitude of sympathy is one of the most important elements of interpersonal relationships. It means the ability to think and feel the same way as the interlocutor, but not instead of him<sup>7</sup>. It is about compassion for the other man but not about identifying with him. Sympathy for the interlocutor means feeling the way he does. Thanks to that, the priest can subjectively sympathize with the man's emotions in order to understand his situation better. Sympathy enables the priest to diagnose the patient from the pastoral point of view and helps the patient to be open to the aid provided by the priest<sup>8</sup>.

Congruence of the priest is also very important. It means the genuine attitude of the balance of the inner and outer experience. People who present congruence of their views and conduct are perceived as reliable. Authenticity in the attitude of the priest enables the contact with the man in need and leads to openness and cooperation. Therefore, the priest must not pretend to be someone else, he must not sham interest in the person in need and in his problems. He must not show that his interest in the man's problems only results from his job. To be authentic, the priest must get to know himself well, his strong and weak points. Pretending to be someone else or faking to possess different features than the real ones in front of the man in need is quickly

<sup>5</sup> A. Kargulowa, *O teorii i praktyce poradnictwa. Podręcznik akademicki*, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>6</sup> A. Tomkiewicz, *Rozmowa duszpasterska...*

<sup>7</sup> C. Rogers, G.N. Kinget, *Psychotherapie et relations humaines*, Louvain 1976.

<sup>8</sup> A. Tomkiewicz, *Rozmowa duszpasterska...*

recognized as fake. Such an attitude makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to conduct pastoral conversation<sup>9</sup>.

The effectiveness of pastoral conversation is also conditioned by the acceptance of the priest for the interlocutor. It must be unconditional which means that the priest must accept his interlocutor regardless of what he says, of his deeds and attitudes. The attitude of acceptance does not equal the acceptance of all his deeds. There is a difference between the man and his deeds. And while the man must be unconditionally accepted, his deeds which are morally wrong must not. Such an acceptance of the man is a kind of love addressed to him and it is reflected in respect. The acceptance of the man in need and its manifestations are motivating factors for the man to introduce new changes and challenges in life. It also concerns moral changes which enable to man to start the process of conversion<sup>10</sup>.

The motives of pastoral conversation are usually determined by those who ask the priest for help. They also choose the subjects of the conversation. Pastoral theology pays particular attention to particular conditions which motivate and determine the subject of the conversation. Pastoral care priests of the German language area practice pastoral conversation during pastoral visits to families, during the service for the sick, in their work with young adults and during the sacrament of penance and reconciliation<sup>11</sup>. In pastoral theology in Poland pastoral conversations are usually conducted at the turn of life. They are also conducted as the preparation of the fiancés for the sacrament of marriage, as the preparation of parents before the baptism of their child as well as with the sick and with the relatives of the people who have recently died<sup>12</sup>. However, there are more and more other cases when the faithful ask for pastoral conversation. Their problems usually concern the broader context of their religious life and of their everyday existence. The analysis of the Polish social and cultural reality leads to determine the most common reasons of the faithful to ask for pastoral conversation. They result both: from the challenges which they face and from the insufficiency of ordinary pastoral care.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kamiński, A. Tomkiewicz, *Rozmowa duszpasterska i jej uwarunkowania psychologiczne*, "Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne" 1986, 33, fasc. 6, pp. 117-134.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> *Das Seelsorgegespräch in der Gemeinde*, ed. K. Baumgartner, Würzburg 1982.

<sup>12</sup> A. Tomkiewicz, *Rozmowa duszpasterska...*

## New religious conditions of pastoral conversation

The ongoing laicisation processes in Poland result in the occurrence of a new attitude towards reality causing far reaching changes in the attitudes of contemporary Catholics. The changes concern their attitude towards God, towards man and towards the world. The change of attitude towards God can be considered a typical phenomenon of laicisation in Europe, however, it looks a bit different in Poland. It is typical to see that people live as if God did not exist. They do not ask questions concerning God's presence in the world or about human existence. They are focused only on the material side of their existence, they tend to achieve personal satisfaction, which is mainly identified with pleasure and with personal success, to a great extent. The specific nature of secularization in Poland is reflected in the layers of the post-communist official phenomenon of atheisation with new currents coming from Western Europe and America<sup>13</sup>. Another specific feature of the Polish secularization is its aggressiveness and strength. This aggression concerns various people, institutions, customs and Christian attitudes especially the ones connected with Catholic Church dominating in its major position in Poland and still strongly influencing the lives of individuals and of the whole society. Young people in Poland are overwhelmed with new arguments stating that God does not exist. His presence as well as His relationships with people are constantly questioned. It is mainly the group of young people who question the existence of God and of the supernatural reality, as the older Polish people experienced confrontation with the material atheism during the time of Marxism. Young people, who are creating their worldview, are facing a number of questions concerning religion but their questions are not answered in a satisfactory way in their family homes or within ordinary pastoral care in the Church. Therefore, they seek help from their priests in order to be able to solve their problems. It should be noticed that young people inform about their problems mostly in an aggressive way, which, however, reflects their uncertainty rather than their negative attitude towards clergy. However, any way of beginning the conversation enables its continuation. At times, the conversation changes into a catechesis or even into preaching of the kerygma.

The aggressive attitudes towards the faithful in Poland are often reflected in ridicule and in public stigmatisation and they are often supported by the public media which reinforce the social consent for such behaviours. Christians feel marginalized and they seek places

<sup>13</sup> K. Świąś, *The Moral Dimension of the Religiosity of Poles in an Era of Systemic Change*, "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej" 2018, 17, No 1, pp. 147-165.

where their faith is accepted and where they can be strengthened in faith<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, they seek pastoral conversation during which they feel accepted, understood and comforted. The media often criticise the negative attitudes of Christians, especially of the clergy, they often publicize scandals caused by Christians in order to spreading the liberal vision of the world. Such situation are difficult for the faithful, not only because of the negative encounter with non-believers. They also need to get to know the truth and to understand what is happening. Therefore, they need pastoral conversations in which they would be honestly informed about what happened and they would get to know the priests' attitudes to the facts, especially their opinions about them<sup>15</sup>.

The most common secularisation processes, which are combined with the Christian tradition and culture, cause confusion in public and in the minds of many Christians. Shown in an attractive way, they present the modern world as if it was a fairy tale. Encouraged for unconditional freedom, Polish people fall into ideological confusion and due to that they take many reckless decisions being convinced that the results of their choices will always be favourable. Such recklessness and the inability to predict the consequences of one's choices contribute to many crises in the personal, internal and community life. After experiencing various life failures, the faithful adopt the attitude of conversion. They decide to come back to God – to, as if, the beginning, and having renewed their relationship with Him, they try to organize their lives. At the stages of the process of coming back to the unity with God and with the Church they need the company of a priest, therefore, pastoral dialogue is also necessary in the pastoral work with them. In the Catholic Church it is often conducted during the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Focusing on the material side of life and aiming at satisfaction based on experiencing pleasure moves some Polish Catholics away from God and from the spiritual aspect of human existence. Treating religion superficially – as a minor thing in life, results in shallowing the internal life and bringing the bond with God to merely fulfilling formal obligations, sometimes treated as unpleasant duties. In such cases priests appear as the originators of pastoral dialogue. As priests see the faithful who fulfil their religious duties simply as a manifestation of tradition, in such situations as: the preparation of the child for baptism, the child's First Communion etc. Such dialogues are usually

<sup>14</sup> B. Grulkowski, *Zagadnienie światopoglądu w poradnictwie psychologicznym*, in: *Poradnictwo psychologiczno-religijne*, ed. J. Kakselon, Kraków 2001, pp. 27-38.

<sup>15</sup> C. Opalach, *Psychologia pastoralna*, Olsztyn 2010.



difficult as the lay people sometimes do not understand what events they take part in, and their impressions of the events often differ from the nature and the true meaning of the events which concern them. Such pastoral dialogues often turn into a catechesis or into preaching the kerygma. It is because priests often aim at not only explaining the rites to them but, first and foremost, they are to deepen their relationship with God.

Laicisation of the Polish society leads to the change in the concept of the man and his place in society and in the world. Christian vision of the man depicts his dignity and prior meaning in society and in the world among the whole creation. Secularised vision of the man and of the world underlines the fortuitousness, relativity of the truth, of the good, and of the beauty, which is reflected in the attitude towards the human being. It results in the superior treatment of the man, and often in taking advantage of people for one's own advantage. In Poland physical workers and wage workers used to be treated badly for centuries. The high rate of unemployment resulted in unfavourable terms of employment contracts, in poor working conditions or ill treatment of workers. The difficult life situation made people seek better working conditions but also ask for the spiritual help from priests<sup>16</sup>. They wanted to get not only material support but also the spiritual one as the poor life conditions resulted in the problems in marriage and family relationships. Furthermore, the phenomenon of economic emigration of young people caused various problems both among emigrants and among those who stayed at home. Such problems are still a common motif and subject of pastoral conversations. For many believers, not only those who live in rural environment, who celebrate traditional religiosity, priests are fiduciaries and helpers in solving existential problems.

The capitalism in Poland is often called wild capitalism. Many of its mechanisms were not regulated by the law, some of them were deliberately omitted in order to promote getting rich by some social groups. As a result some groups of society soon became rich and the number of those who failed increased. Economic failure, falling into debts and other similar conditions led to the crisis of many people. Capitalism turned out to be the cause of their life failure which led to family break up or even to suicide. Many people in such conditions seeks help from priests. As it turned out, their friends left them in their crisis.

The people who took wrong business decisions and as a result became poor and got into debts which they had to pay for many years,

<sup>16</sup> R.P. Vaughan, *Poradnictwo pastoralne a zaburzenia osobowości*, Kraków 1999.



also found themselves in such a situation. Long-term stress, worrying about their everyday existence, in many cases facing the lack of sympathy from their close ones result in their need to seek help from priests. People in the difficult long-term situation are offered constant contact and pastoral conversations for them are systematic and frequent.

## New existential conditions of pastoral conversation

The changing social and cultural conditions of life in contemporary Poland influence religiousness and the need for pastoral conversation. This influence is noticeable in all social groups, however, it is mostly visible among young people and adults. Loneliness is the main problem of contemporary young people. Growing up with their busy working parents who work for their own success and prioritize their needs in their professional life and career, many young people face emotional emptiness. Their unsatisfied psychological needs, particularly social needs, lead to seeking the emotional closeness with other people and to building communities with them. At the same time, common easy access to the Internet and easy access to electronic devices, especially portable ones, make it very easy to use the Internet, which leads to the fact that many young people spend most of their time in the virtual world. Social media are very popular among young people in Poland, they use the media to share their personal information, their joy and personal, family, school and social life problems<sup>17</sup>.

The co-existence with other young people in the social media is called “contacts” and is very superficial in nature. The deeper bonds which result from the contact in the Internet are extremely rare. Seeking the acceptance from others, young people are able to strive for a large number of “likes” and gather many friends in the social media. For some people it is the self-value determinant which serves to satisfy the need of appreciation. However, transforming the majority of activities to the virtual world leads to negative effects. One of such negative effects is the reduced ability to establish and deepen relationship in the real world. As a result, young people isolate themselves from the real world and from their peers. Another problem is the inability to distinguish between the real world and the virtual world which are often mixed in the minds of young people. The lack of the

<sup>17</sup> A. Drzewiecka, *Okres wczesnej dorosłości jako przestrzeń działań współczesnego poradnictwa*, in: *Poradnictwo w kulturze indywidualizmu*, ed. E. Zierkiewicz, V. Drabak-Podgórna, Wrocław 2010, pp. 205-218.

reality of the real world often leads young people to become victims of the cyberbullies<sup>18</sup>.

The loneliness of young people in Poland leads them to establish interpersonal relationships also in the real world. It should be noticed that the information learnt from the Internet also helps to get to know new people and to deepen their interpersonal bonds also outside the social media<sup>19</sup>. Many young people look for others who think in the same way in the Catholic Church. That is how they are led to small communities and religious groups where they can find understanding and spiritual support. Their presence in religious associations allows them to have contact with priests because, as a rule, priests are the leaders and moderators of such communities. Pastoral conversations with those young people usually resemble ordinary conversations, however, they often lead to the conversation in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Some of those young people also ask for spiritual guidance.

Even those young people who are not members of religious groups ask for pastoral conversation. They are able to meet priests during various pastoral events in which they participate. In most cases it is their religious education class at school or the parish catechesis, e.g. during the course of preparation for the sacrament of confirmation. It is important for them to get to know the priest better, to appreciate his attitude and authority among young people.

What is more, the attitude of the priests and his engagement into the work with young people is important because of the current crisis of authority in Poland. In particular the crisis concerns the family and the parents' authority. Young people, who at the stage of adolescence need the presence of parents at various levels, often experience lack of this presence and, first and foremost, the weakness of the emotional family bonds. Parents who are unable to satisfy the emotional needs of their children, try to make it up for them with money and material goods, as well as with gadgets which lead young people to start living in the virtual reality. Some parents establish their emotional bonds with the children through the virtual media. Many researchers notice the particularly painful dysfunction of fathers in the family. It is one of the reasons why young people seek contact with priests, looking for the

<sup>18</sup> A. Wieja, H. Wieja, *Jak skutecznie pomagać innym? Część 4. Specjalizacje – specyfika problemu*, Ustroń 2009.

<sup>19</sup> M. Chmielewski, *Ewangelizacyjna misja Kościoła a social media*, "Studia Leopoliensia" 10(2017), pp. 191-205.

father's authority and support. In such cases pastoral conversations are a replacement of young people's conversations with their fathers<sup>20</sup>.

Social and cultural changes are reflected in the difficulties of adult Catholics who seek help from priests. Individualism, which is now common among adult Polish people, brings various results in their lives. One of them is the inability to build stable relationships. Traditional marriage, meant as the exclusive and life-long relationship of a man and a woman, is more difficult to realize by many couples. It mainly results from the conflict between love meant as the gift of self or sacrifice for the spouse and focusing on oneself, meant as self-realization and satisfying one's needs. The need for self-realization underlined by the current culture which often leads to egocentrism or egotism, overwhelms love. That is why the partner is treated only as a tool for satisfying one's needs, e.g. the emotional needs and sexual ones. When these needs are not satisfied, the partners are let and exchanged for ones who meet these needs and expectations<sup>21</sup>.

Focusing on one's goal and needs reduces marriage to agreement between two egoisms rather than a love covenant. As a result the relationship is full of various conflicts which are developing, causing the break-up. Many young Catholics in Poland are not able to build deep relationships, but only some shallow relationships. Furthermore, with the act that people become mature enough to take responsibility for others later in life, this lack of ability to create a steady relationship, young people do not contract marriage but rather they create shallow short-term relationships which soon break up<sup>22</sup>.

Experiencing the duality which, on the one hand, is longing for the lasting and permanent closeness with the loving person, and, on the other hand, the inability to build such a relationship, leads young people to serious doubts concerning marriage and the family. It results from the fact that many of them have not learned at home how to build such a relationship with another person<sup>23</sup>. The culture of liberalism does not encourage for building permanent relationships but rather – temporary ones. That is why young adults seek help from

<sup>20</sup> W. Pawliczuk, *Poradnictwo psychologiczne w okresie adolescencji*, in: *Poradnictwo psychologiczne*, ed. C. Czabała, S. Kluczyńska, Warszawa 2015, pp. 109-130.

<sup>21</sup> K. Geldard, D. Geldard, *Rozmowa, która pomaga. Podstawowe umiejętności terapeutyczne*, Gdańsk 2004.

<sup>22</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *Duszpasterskie poradnictwo małżeńskie w Polsce. Studium pastoralne*, Opole 2010.

<sup>23</sup> G. Pyżlak, *Czystość w narzeczeństwie i w życiu małżeńskim*, "Teologia i Człowiek" 2022, 59, No. 3, pp. 97-114.

priests in building marriage. It mainly happens in case of marriage crisis, especially when it is long-lasting and deepens with time. Pastoral conversations with priests are not always effective that is why young people are sent to counselling centres in order to solve their problems with family life counsellors and psychologists.

The liberal style of life which is becoming more common in the Polish society, brings different cultural patterns which are so culturally different from the Christian mentality and culture. One of such patterns is the liberal attitude towards the sexual sphere. This leads to the increase in the number of adulteries. For many Catholics it is still unthinkable, while the fact of adultery which they committed is the source of their strong remorse. Some spouses, in case of the marriage crisis, enter close relationships with other people. The majority of them have no intention of adultery but entering into close relationship often leads to that. It also causes great remorse and the need to make up for the committed evil. It takes place regardless of the fact whether the spouse is aware of the adultery or not. Such confused spouses ask for pastoral conversation often combined with the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Pastoral conversations, as there usually are a series of them, lead to the personal conversion and the development of the condition of marriage<sup>24</sup>.

The issues connected with bringing up children are also the leading motif of pastoral conversations with adults. Catholic parents who lost control of bringing up their children or parents of the children who have serious problems often ask for help from priests<sup>25</sup>. The first situation takes place when parents lose control of their children. It mainly happens when the children at young age were left too much freedom, which leads to the crisis at the stage of adolescence which often is out of the parents control. Such a situation causes the lack of balance of the family life and leads to fierce conflicts between parents and children. The second situation takes place when the child, often during adolescence, has problems with the law or gets addicted to drugs etc. In many cases the second situation results from the first one. Parents who have serious problems with their children ask priests for help believing that they will help them overcome the problems and prevent others. The inefficient results of coping with the problems with their children,

<sup>24</sup> J. Młyński, *Praktyczne formy metodycznego pomagania rodzinie w problemach społecznych*, in: *Poradnictwo rodzinne w teorii i praktyce*, Kraków 2013.

<sup>25</sup> A. Pryba, *Mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec. Współczesne wyzwania*, in: *Rodzina przyszłością świata? W kręgu zamysłów nad rodziną*, ed. A. Pryba, Poznań 2009, pp. 29-40.

even with the help of special institutions, is often a motif for pastoral conversation as parents want to use all the available preventive means, also those from the Catholic Church. Some parents see pastoral help as their last resort. Pastoral conversations often lead parents to seek cooperation with all the available institutions which possess the means to provide proper aid: school, counseling centres, the police, court etc. providing psychological and spiritual support to the parents by such institutions is an important part of pastoral conversation.

## New challenges for the pastoral ministry of priests

Similarly to the changes of life conditions of contemporary Polish people, the conditions for the pastoral ministry of priests also change. The large amount of duties is the basic problem of priests. There are many traditional forms of pastoral ministry which are a part of ordinary pastoral care and which aim at the realization of the basic functions of the Catholic Church. These pastoral forms, which implement the mission of the Catholic Church, must be realized for the good of the faithful and so that the Church did not lose Her authenticity and did not object to the mission designated by Christ. Among these, inalienable forms, there are also others which are introduced because of the needs and expectations of the faithful. The latter are the Catholic Church's response to the signs of time. These are e.g. various ways of working with groups, the developing charity and social care work, new forms of evangelisation etc. Introducing new pastoral activities is done bottom-up, due to the initiative of priests, often upon the request of the lay faithful and as a result of the decisions of the Church authorities. Many pastoral initiatives are introduced due to the decisions at the diocesan and supra diocesan level.

Performing traditional forms of pastoral care and introducing new ones leads to the increase in the amount of duties of priests and their duty overload. As a result priests are tired and they have no time for taking on new challenges<sup>26</sup>. Priests do not have enough time for pastoral conversations. Facing the necessity to choose the ministry for larger groups of people and the service for single ones, they get engaged into the service for a community, providing it to a larger amount of people. The ongoing individualization of social and religious life in Poland results in the lack of free time necessary to conduct pastoral

<sup>26</sup> Z. Zarembski, *Psychologiczno-pedagogiczne uwarunkowania duszpasterstwa ludzi w podeszłym wieku*, in: *Seniorzy wyzwaniem dla Kościoła*, ed. M.J. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Warszawa 2019, pp. 201-220.

conversations. Therefore, the complex existential and religious problems of many people cannot be solved (Lipiec, 2018)<sup>27</sup>.

Despite the lack of sufficient amount of time, priests undertake pastoral conversations. However, they are rarely continued or they do not lead to an effective solutions to problems. The lack of proper conditions for pastoral conversation is not favourable for the development of the conversation.

The insufficient preparation for individual pastoral care and for conducting pastoral conversation is another problem of contemporary priests. The mass scale of pastoral care in Poland results in the fact that it is a priority for priests to take proper pastoral care for as many faithful as possible. Due to that the most important task of pastoral care concerns the activity addressed for small or big groups of the faithful. It is reflected in the preparation for pastoral care in the initial formation in the stage of seminary studies as well as in the ongoing formation after the ordination.

In the light of contemporary challenges and pastoral needs which concern pastoral conversation, the preparation of priests turns out to be insufficient. Although priests and candidates for ordination participate in the classes of psychology, pedagogics and similar disciplines, the range of knowledge and skills does not seem sufficient. They also participate in the preparation of the spiritual guidance but it is necessary to intensify it.

The insufficiency of the preparation for pastoral conversation and for other forms of individual pastoral care is noticed even by priests themselves. The majority of them does not feel competent to efficiently realize this kind of ministry. Many priests feel anxious before their conversations with the faithful because they think that they are not able to provide proper aid. These fears concern both substantive preparation as well as the methods of conducting such conversations. It particularly concerns the ability to start the pastoral conversation and to conduct it. Therefore, it is necessary to devote more time of the priestly formation or the staff training to the preparation for the pastoral conversation and to other forms of individual pastoral care.

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## Conclusion

The ongoing cultural and religious changes which are taking place in the Polish society require adjusting pastoral care to the new challenges

<sup>27</sup> D. Lipiec, *The Normative Dimension of the Pastoral Formation of Seminarians*, "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej" 2018, 17, No 1, pp. 148-169.



which they bring. One of the necessary changes is the appreciation of pastoral conversation as a kind of pastoral ministry. It is necessary to introduce changes into the organization of pastoral care, especially of the parish pastoral care, and to increase the amount of time devoted to individual meetings and conversations. Due to the burden of various duties of priest, it is also necessary to transfer some of these duties on the secular Catholics. Not all of the activities which used to be performed by priests require ordination, therefore, they can be taken over by the laity. The need for a better preparation of priests to perform individual pastoral care is clearer now. It requires a deeper study in the theological field as well as in other fields during seminary studies. It is necessary to introduce trainings, courses and workshops and other similar forms of developing pastoral skills in the ongoing formation of priests. It should also concern the lay pastoral workers.

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