

LIFE OF SSND's of THE POLISH PROVINCE IN THE COMMUNISTIC TIMES, 1945-1989

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After the end of World War II, in 1945 and 1946, the Polish province lost its motherhouse and seven other convents in the east of Poland. This happened because the eastern country borders had been pushed to the west and, consequently, the eastern part of Poland became part of the Soviet Russia. The sisters of those convents were expatriated and had to leave. They all went to the west of Poland. There they joined the sisters in two Polish convents.

As those who believed in God, as members of the Catholic Church, and as religious, we did not fit into the communistic system and materialistic philosophy. Thus, all possible means were used by the comunistic [sic] government to make us decrease and to reduce as much as possible our influence on the society, especially on young people. We were treated as people of a bad category and were deprived of many rights that other citizens had, and were very far from the rights of the members of the communistic party.

As such:

1. We were under constant control: telephone calls were being overheard, letters were checked, in many cases we were spied. (upon)
We kept no letter or telephone contact (especially in the 1950-ties) with the Generalate or with our SSND's outside the country. Later, the contacts with countries outside the "iron curtain" were still very limited and most cautious, as by the communists they were considered to be suspicious, harmful and hostile for the country.
2. Sisters were not allowed to study at universities. Like all religious who wanted to study, we too could do it only at the only Catholic university in the country in the distant city of Lublin. This university has been maintained until today only by the Polish people/society/, not by the government, and it has only faculties of arts/ humanities/ and theology, no faculties of science.
3. Our postulants who studied in public middle schools and high schools, kept in secret the fact that they were candidates for religious life. This was done in fear of difficulties in passing their final examinations. In some cases they even did not live in our convent, but with families of our friends.
4. Apostolic service to youth was forbidden. So, there were no schools, no hostels, and the like, (after 1954 also no pre-schools). In 1955, normal healthy children from our institutions were taken away, and we were given handicapped children. There were in the country just a few private schools conducted by some religious congregations, but they existed only just for the sake of appearances.

The sisters taught religion (catechesis) in church rooms, often very poor ones or in churches (without heating in winter). But teaching religion was illegal because all the places where religion was taught, had to be declared to the governmental authorities to be registered there, and we did not do that. If we would have done it, the communists would have had the right to make inspections. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, who was a strong man against the communistic system, did not allow the government to decide on matters concerning religion and Church. He often courageously said to the government: "Non possumus". All kinds of organizations or Church activities were forbidden. Yet, in spite of that, much was being done, risking repressions.

5. Visiting countries outside the "iron curtain" was for us religious not possible in the 1950-ties, 1960-ties.[sic] Also later it was extremely difficult to get a passport. After a long waiting, you often received, even a several times, a negative answer, without knowing the reasons why you did not get a passport. Passports were issued by the police. If you wanted to speak with the director, you had to wait very long hours in the corridor, and then in the conversation in the director's office, you were treated in a bad and humiliating way.

6. In 1954, after Cardinal Wyszyński had been arrested, the government decided to close many convents of women religious. On the 3rd of August, 1954, nine convents of SSND's in the western part of the country were closed by the communistic authorities. And so 87 sisters were removed from the convents during one night, leaving their ministries – preschools, courses for girls, etc. This was quite unexpected by the sisters. The convents were surrounded by a cordon of police and the sisters, together with what they were able to take with them, were loaded on trucks. The sisters did not know where they were going. Special working camps had been prepared for them. Sisters of other congregations were brought and placed there. But our provincial leader, Mother M. Jaroslawa Bonczek, categorically demanded that our sisters be brought into our convents. So, the sisters were brought to the motherhouse in Opole and to two other convents. These convents were not prepared for so many additional persons. It was a very hard time. The removed sisters were still under the communistic control; they were not allowed to be sent to other convents. To earn their living, they had to look for work which was not an easy thing. The buildings from which the sisters had been deported, were congregational buildings, but since that day they were taken and used by the governmental authorities and, except two of them, they have never been returned to the Congregation, nor any recompensation was given for the houses, the gardens and other things left on the properties.

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