

## The Archbishop's Charitable Committee in Wrocław from 1981 to 2007. An Outline of the Social and Educational Activities

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*The article deals with the history of formation of The Archbishop's Charitable Committee (AKCh) in Wrocław which was established in 1982 during the imposition of martial law in Poland. It describes its organizational structure and its activity in the years 1982–2007. The author presents social and educational aspects of the activity of AKCh.*

*Key words: specific non-governmental organization; charitable institution; martial law in Poland*

Imposing martial law in Poland on December 13, 1981 resulted in repressions of thousands of persons. Arrests often led to convictions of illegal political activity, internment in 'isolation centres', deprivation of parental authority, job dismissals resulting in sharp fall of living standards, surveillance and other persecutions.<sup>1</sup>

The situation was no different in Lower Silesia and in Wrocław, its capital. At the beginning of martial law, young people, mostly students and academics of Wrocław's universities, who belonged to Academic Ministry, spontaneously brought help to the repressed people and their families. It was 'a gesture that came of the goodness of their hearts and minds'.<sup>2</sup> With time, they were joined by their academic tutors, people of various professions: judges and barristers who were authorities in their fields, doctors, teachers, journalists, artists, members of Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. They were people of goodwill wanting to express their opposition to the actions taken by the regime which 'declared war' on The Poles. Differences between generations, in the level of their knowledge and experience,

<sup>1</sup> According to the data presented in the publication B. Cybulski (2006). *Stan wojenny na Dolnym Śląsku. Lista internowanych, dokumenty, zdjęcia* there were 1923 internees in Lower Silesia region.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation comes from the statement by Metropolitan of Wrocław Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz.

as well as their social background and class became apparent. Joint actions were taken by the generation which conspired in The Home Army<sup>3</sup> and dissidents from The Polish People's Republic era together with young people who acted in Independent Students' Association and contributed to the establishment of Solidarity movement.<sup>4</sup> The knowledge and the experience of the old joined by the enthusiasm and the energy of the young made the seemingly unsolvable tasks possible to carry out. There was no pathos in it, only the rational judgment of the situation and the pragmatism of actions.

Initially, two groups of activists, concentrated around students' chaplains, acted almost simultaneously. One of them was constituted by Dorota Jarodzka-Śródka, Krzysztof Tabisz, Kazimierz Czapliński, Wiesława Talarczyk-Napierała and Jadwiga Brzuchowska. They gathered around the priest Stanisław Orzechowski in 'Wawrzyny' Academic Ministry ('The Laurels' Academic Ministry)<sup>5</sup> at Bujwida Street. The other constituted by Marek and Teresa Lewkowicz, Anna Janicka-Dutkiewicz, Elżbieta Stępień-Jednoróg, Stanisław Murawski and Jan Wojewódzki met at the priest Aleksander Zienkiewicz's at The Central Academic Ministry Centre (Centralny Ośrodek Duszpasterstwa Akademickiego, Polish abbreviation: CODA) at 4 Katedralna Street<sup>6</sup> in Wrocław. At the end of December 1981 both groups established contact and began cooperation, locating their main office at CODA's premises at 4 Katedralna Street. As AKCh developed over time, the church made their premises located in various parts of Wrocław available for them. Because of lack of 'working hands', it was decided that each member would bring a trusted person willing to work for the internees and their families. One of the most significant tasks was to collect information about the repressed people.<sup>7</sup> In the first days of martial law, the two groups disposed of first incomplete lists of the internees, the arrested and the missing ones. The living conditions and whereabouts of many of them were unknown, neither was their future, but it was

<sup>3</sup> The Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa – abbreviated AK) was a Polish military formation acting underground when the country was under German and Soviet occupation during World War II.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Students' Association (Polish abbreviation: NZS, the equivalent of 'Solidarity') was established in 1980 as an opposition to Socialist Polish Students' Association (Polish abbreviation: SZSP)

<sup>5</sup> Academic Ministry is a social activity of the church directed at students, within which formational, educational, cultural and voluntary work take place.

<sup>6</sup> Jakubiec, Z. (2011). 25 lat Arcybiskupiego Komitetu Charytatywnego we Wrocławiu. *Rocznik Wrocławski*, No. 12, 243–254. On the basis of archival materials collected in Dział Dokumentów Życia Społecznego in ZN im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, AKCh ref. no. XX 1/10/10.

<sup>7</sup> During martial law in Poland telecommunications network was disconnected, activity of social organizations was suspended (Catholic Intelligentsia Club's among others), most public institutions and some workplaces were militarized. In such conditions obtaining information was severely hindered.

necessary to verify and complete the lists. In order to do that, compiling and completing the list of the internees of the Archdiocese of Wrocław began. Information about such people came from different sources: their families, the acquaintances of the repressed people, their colleagues, liaisons from parishes, secret messages smuggled out of prison, sometimes from accidental witnesses. As a consequence, the document containing names and addresses of the interned Lower Silesians was produced. The register, compiled at the turn of the year 1981/1982, was incomplete, but it facilitated the help to the families whose members were on the list.<sup>8</sup>

It provided the foundation for the register of the repressed people in the Lower Silesia region. The register compiled all types of repressions: arrest, internment, beating, 48-hour-detention, interrogation, search, confiscation, intimidation by the Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa, Polish abbreviation – SB). People who kept track of the register the longest were Klara and Paweł Tomaszewski, Jadwiga Nadgórniewicz, Alicja Jakubiszyn, Maria Witecka, and Elżbieta Machowczyk. Anna Janicka-Dutkiewicz, the inspirer of the venture, was the one who watched over it. At the end of February 1982, the decision has been made to give official and organized form to the spontaneous actions whose scope was constantly expanding.

During martial law, the activities of the scarce but formerly functioning social organizations were suspended. Since there were no legal arrangements with the force of acts enabling the establishment of associations,<sup>9</sup> Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz<sup>10</sup> was asked for help. Due to its high social prestige, church became the only rock for the society, also for non-believers. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982 Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz established Archbishop's Charitable Committee (Polish abbreviation – AKCh) and its council consisting of Jadwiga Brzuchowska, Kazimierz Czapliński, Roman Duda, Bogna Grabowska, Anna Janicka-Dutkiewicz, Dorota Jarodzka-Śródka, Urszula Koziół, Marek Lewkowicz, Józef Łukaszewicz, Elżbieta Popławska-Dobiejewska, Zofia Pruszyńska, Stefan Suchar, Ewa Szumańska-Szmorlińska, Krzysztof Tabisz, Wiesława Talarczyk-Napierała. Archbishop Gulbinowicz placed great trust in the Committee and gave extensive competences to its members.<sup>11</sup> Although Archbishop's Charitable Committee started as an initiative of secular people, it was supported by the hierarchs of Archdiocese of Wrocław: Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz and Bishop Adam Dyczkowski. By placing it in the

<sup>8</sup> Skotnicka, M. (2011). Arcybiskupi Komitet Charytatywny we Wrocławiu w okresie stanu wojennego. *Kwartalnik Pamięć i przyszłość*, No. 4 (14), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Law regulating the establishment of associations was passed on April, 7<sup>th</sup> 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Priest Henryk Gulbinowicz – Roman Catholic cleric, doctor of theology, Metropolitan Archbishop of Wrocław (1974–2004), Cardinal since 1985, since 2004 Retired Archbishop of Archdiocese of Wrocław.

<sup>11</sup> All members of AKCh received so-called 'safe conduct passes' which were certificates signed by the bishop and served as documents lending credence to their activities.

church's structure, they put up a protective shield over it, which was absolutely necessary during martial law. The moderator and the coordinator on behalf of the church was the students' chaplain priest Andrzej Dziełak. After the period of collegial leadership, the functions of the presidents on behalf of the seculars were subsequently performed by a mathematician from University of Wrocław, its later Rector Professor Roman Duda (from 1982 to October 1984), Doctor of Philosophy and Associate Professor of Mathematical Institute of University of Wrocław Krzysztof Tabisz (from November 1984 to June 1989), naturalist of Polish Academy of Sciences Professor Zbigniew Jakubiec (from July 1989 to September 1996 and again after the death of Józef Grodzicki from 2003 to 2007), solicitor Józef Grodzicki from October 1996 to 2002. The function of the coordinators of current work of the Committee was performed by: Anna Janicka-Dutkiewicz, Elżbieta Machowszczykova, Apolonia Stawiarz, Alina Tańska, Stanisława Masłowska.

Gradually, organizational structure of AKCh started emerging. It took the form of sections responsible for different types of activities based on voluntary work. Their number and the scope of action changed along with the need and the socio-political situation. So did their composition and the number of people working in particular sections. The sections whose tasks focused on helping the repressed people were formed the earliest.

They were:<sup>12</sup>

Section of Immediate Help (under the leadership of Barbara Grabowska and Barbara Netreba) whose aim was to reach the families of the repressed ones with swift help and information.

Section of Care for The Internees and Their Families<sup>13</sup> (led by Anna Janicka-Dutkiewicz) was supposed to maintain contact with the internees, help their families, keep their record and pass the information on to the public. This section also cared for people who were hiding and their families.

Section of Care for Political Prisoners and Their Families (under the leadership of Anna Łuszczewska, Elżbieta Machowszczykova, Zbigniew Jakubiec) which

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<sup>12</sup> Skotnicka, M. (2011). Arcybiskupi Komitet Charytatywny we Wrocławiu w okresie stanu wojennego. *Kwartalnik Pamięć i Przyszłość*, No. 4 (14), 33–38; Jakubiec, Z. (2011). *25 lat Arcybiskupiego Komitetu Charytatywnego we Wrocławiu*. *Rocznik Wrocławski*, No. 12, 243–254; *Arcybiskupi Komitet Charytatywny we Wrocławiu 'Pod czwórka'*, ed. Dillenius, Z. (1997). Studies by Grzegorz Polak on the basis of documents of AKCh collected in Dział Dokumentów Życia Społecznego in ZN im. Ossolińskich. Wrocław; personal memories and notes of the author who was a member of AKCh.

<sup>13</sup> Internees from Wrocław and Lower Silesia stayed in isolation centres in Głogów, Grodków, Nysa, Darłówek, Gołdap, Załęże near Rzeszów. Initially they were directed to Kamienna Góra where the centre was located in former subsidiary of Gross-Rosen concentration camp. The members of AKCh found it unacceptable. Immediate intervention of Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz resulted in the closure of the centre at the end of March 1982. People who were imprisoned there were released or moved to other centres, mainly to Głogów.

kept the register of the imprisoned, helped them and their families, supported people convicted by misdemeanour court, cared for the families of the dead and the severely wounded, evaluated the living conditions of prisoners.

Section of Liaisons (led by Dorota Jarodzka-Śródka and Stefan Suchar) maintained contact with parishes, workplaces, carried out background checks by order of other sections.

Section of Duties (administered by Marcjanna Śliwińska and Zbigniewa Jakubowska) made contact with new volunteers willing to work for AKCh and directed them to appropriate sections. It also offered free emergency help for the poor, informed those in need about other institutions providing support. Between 1982 and 1990 11,676 people were attended to in course of the doctors' duties.<sup>14</sup>

Section of Legal Help in which barristers and solicitors offered help to the repressed ones and their families. Legal counseling involved personal problems of the oppressed, e.g. the confiscation of property, being fired from work, indictment. It was under collegial leadership and administered by Retired Judge Mirosław Filipowicz. Barristers took part in several hundred political processes.

Section of Processes (led by Teresa Lewkowicz, Lesław Bielak and Alina Tańska) dealt with observation of political processes, collected and kept records of processes, wrote reports of the processes and some of the misdemeanour court proceedings, organized participation of defense attorneys.

Section of Medical Help (under the leadership of Ewa Szumańska-Szmorlińska and a pharmacist Jadwiga Michalewska whose main duty was to provide medicines for the ones who needed them) cared for prisoners, internees and their families, in cooperation with doctors, it ran medical tests of the people leaving penitentiaries and internment centres, intervened with prison authorities in case of decrease in health condition of the prisoners, organized hospital care for the ill ones or the ones who were threatened by repressions. Its activity lasted until the end of martial law. On the basis of the collected data, a report "The health of the political prisoners" was compiled.<sup>15</sup>

Section of Finances (administered by Wiesława Talarczyk-Napierała and Apolonia Stawiarz) provided financial resources from church resources and benefactors. It offered economic assistance, covered the expenses of financial penalties and court fees. It also kept financial record of AKCh. Between 1982 and 1989 it provided economic help for 1174 people.<sup>16</sup>

Warehouse Section (led by Krzysztof Tabisz and Apolonia Stawiarz) made and maintained contact with foreign benefactors, received transports from abroad and contributions from the public. They prepared parcels with food, sanitary items,

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<sup>14</sup> Jakubiec, Z. *25 lat...*, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Sidorowicz, S. – Szablicka-Żak, J. (2011). Problemy medyczne osób represjonowanych w stanie wojennym. *Rocznik Wrocławski*, No. 12, 265–274.

<sup>16</sup> Jakubiec, Z. *25 lat...*

clothes for the repressed or hiding people and their families. From the very beginning, they also took the poor and the criminal prisoners into care.

Annually, from 12 to 20 tonnes of food were distributed,<sup>17</sup> so were the medicines and clothes. The necessity to provide help to the criminal prisoners serving their sentence in extremely bad conditions stemmed from reports delivered by political prisoners. In 1989, out of the inspiration of members of AKCh, Wrocław's Prisoners' Care Society was established. It continues its activities until today.

Section of Transport (Ryszard Obłąk and Bolesław Stembalski) organized means of transport to prisons and internment centres. It also dealt with transports from abroad (correspondence, customs clearance, waybills).

Holiday Section organized vacation for children and members of repressed families and for former internees as well as for political prisoners leaving penitentiary. Children were sent to sanatoriums, vacations were organized in village rectories and on the farms. The section has been in operation since 1988 under the leadership of Jolanta Fercz and it provided vacation for about 1200 people<sup>18</sup>.

Section of Help for Deprived of Work (administered by Agnieszka Kocot) kept register of people fired from work for political reasons. Since the possibility of legal employment of the released were unreal, the section did not operate long.

Teachers' Section (Maria Dąbrowska and Maria Jabłońska) collected information about repressions in teachers' environment, among school-age youth and students. It organized material and legal help in agreement with other sections.

Section of Twin Families helped to make contact between the repressed families and the families who felt the need to help. Its initiator and supervisor was Wrocław's journalist Ewa Szumańska-Szmorlińska.

Documentation that was created in particular sections was archived and after the activity of AKCh ended, it was passed on to Documents of Social Life Department in Ossoliński National Institute. Reports created on the basis of the documentation were directed to Amnesty International, Helsinki Committee, United Nations. One example could be a report entitled: 'The Health of Political Prisoners'<sup>19</sup>, written in 1992 out of senator Zofia Kuratowska's<sup>20</sup> inspiration. It was the summary of medical tests run from 1984 to 1985 by Section of Medical Help. They were carried out on Lower Silesians, who were released from internment

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Sidorowicz, S. – Szablicka-Żak, J. (2011). Problemy medyczne osób represjonowanych w stanie wojennym. *Rocznik Wrocławski*, No. 12, 265–274.

<sup>20</sup> Zofia Kuratowska (1931–1999), hematologist, Professor of Medical University of Warsaw. In the 80s Kuratowska was involved in Solidarity, during martial law she was a member of Primate's Committee for the Aid of Detained People and Their Families in Warsaw. She was the Deputy Speaker of the Senat of term I and III, from 1998–1999 the Ambassador to South Africa.

centres, arrests and penitentiaries. The coordinator of the tests, also run in other regions of Poland, was Zofia Kuratowska from Doctor's Section of Primate's Committee for the Aid of Detained People and Their Families in Warsaw. The tests were carried out according to the uniform scheme. Later, medical history questionnaires were prepared on their basis. The results of the tests together with medical history documentation were passed on to World Health Organization within United Nations.

Visiting the families of the repressed people, AKCh representatives looked for contact with local parish priests in order to provide help to the victims. In this way AKCh enlisted the cooperation with local centres in Wołów, Brzeg Dolny, Wałbrzych, Świdnica, Bielawa, Legnica, Lublin, Polkowice, Strzelin, Żąbkowice Śląskie, Kłodzko, Dzierżoniów, Oława, Jelenia Góra among others. The area which suffered notably during martial law was Zagłębie Miedziowe (Copper Basin) (Lublin, Polkowice, Głogów) where brutal pacifications of mines and ironworks took place and where armoured cars and ZOMO troops were used.

Arrests and judicial decisions which were ordered on innocent people became the reason of further protest actions and formation of new centres of opposition. In this situation a lot of families needed material, legal, medical or moral support. Such help was possible due to the activity of AKCh, which monthly delivered 200-kilo-parcels containing food, most necessary clothing, infant foods and medicines, sometimes also money for allowances.

Lifting martial law on July, 22<sup>nd</sup> 1983 did not improve the situation in the country, which was why AKCh continued its activities. It eventually ended them in 2007. The need for voluntary help resulted from political and economic situation, since it was only after 1989 that the system of social care in Poland started forming and the independent charitable activity of the Church, Caritas Polska, began renewing.

However heroic the first period of activity (1981–1989) of AKCh was in the opinion of its founders, its second period (1989–2007) deserves to be called 'Samaritan'. At that time help focused on poor people or the ones who found themselves in a difficult life situation due to systemic transformation. Earlier methods and forms of work were made use of. Sections which came into being after 1989 concentrated their activities on legal counseling, family counseling, counseling concerning work and social insurance. They also offered material and financial help. Various actions the inhabitants of Wrocław took part in were organized. One of them was 'The Gift of The Heart' which was the collection of cakes for prisoners during Christmast time. AKCh ran 'The Pharmacy'<sup>21</sup> (in Polish: Apteka) in which volunteer pharmacists filled the prescriptions free of charge. The medicines came from non-governmental organizations,

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<sup>21</sup> Medicines distribution point, located at The Pauline Fathers', at Antoniego Street. It was administered by Anna Huskowska.

pharmaceutical companies, doctors and private persons from France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Great Britain, U.S.A., Japan, Austria, Denmark and India.<sup>22</sup> AKCh cooperated with Prisoners' Care Society of Wrocław which emerged from it.

AKCh bore the hallmark of independent non-governmental organization in period in which such organizations could not exist in communistic country. One must remember that Caritas, catholic charitable organization which existed in Polish lands since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, came under force administration rules in 1950 and lost its independence. Its activity was brought down to parishes' level and was under state's control. The organization was refunded on October 10, 1990 as Caritas Polska – charitable institution of Polish Episcopal Conference.<sup>23</sup>

AKCh was a spontaneous initiative of laymen, supported by the authority of Church dignitaries.<sup>24</sup> It enabled relatively safe work in martial law conditions. Church allowed its members to act freely, making the development of numerous initiatives possible. AKCh tried to provide help for everyone in need no matter what their beliefs or religion were. Fulfilling its mission, it was directed outwards. Above all, it offered help to the ones who suffered most in the first weeks of martial law and later to the poorest ones who simply could not cope with their problems in the new reality of the time of systemic transformation.

Working in AKCh was for its members an excellent school of voluntary service on many levels and in many, often dramatic and dangerous situations. The experiences and the knowledge became the basis for the rest of their lives. For the young AKCh was also a meeting with live history and people who made it. Monthly meetings of AKCh members, during which lectures and speeches were given, had educational value and played an important role in maturation, especially of the young people.

The fact that the guests represented various scientific fields, came from different cultures and had different religious beliefs were of great importance and added special value to the meetings.

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<sup>22</sup> Polak, G. (2011). Darczyńcy Arcybiskupiego Komitetu Charytatywnego 1982–1989. *Rocznik Wrocławski*, No. 12, 275–294.

<sup>23</sup> [www.Caritas.pl](http://www.Caritas.pl)

<sup>24</sup> Micewski, A. (1987). Kościół wobec „Solidarności” i stanu wojennego. *Édition du dialogue*, 220–230, series: Znaki czasu. Paris.