

**The Contribution of Josaphata Hordashevskia
and the Congregation of the Sisters Servants to the
Development of Ukrainian Preschool Education and Socio-
pedagogical Assistance to the Rural Population in Galicia
(Late 19th and early 20th Century)**

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For many centuries, the preservation and development of the Ukrainian national culture and education was possible only due to the efforts of prominent public figures and spiritual leaders. These included the Ukrainian monastic communities, which contributed significantly to the social and cultural development of Galicia in the late 19th - early 20th centuries, particularly the Sisters Servants.

The purpose of the article is to highlight the contribution of the Servant Sister Josaphata Hordashevskia to the foundation and development of preschool for rural Ukrainian children, and to the organisation of charitable activities for the benefit of adults, including the elderly and sick.

The Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate was established in 1892 with the purpose to provide educational and social services for the rural population. The first Sister Servant, Josaphata Hordashevskia, set an inspiring example of the devoted service to the Ukrainian people in the field of preschool education and socio-pedagogical assistance. Her deeds

demonstrated the example of a holy life, full of sacrificial and tireless service to the needs of others.

Josaphata's teaching career began in a preschool educational institution for Ukrainian children, the first of this kind in Galicia, in 1893. Thanks to her efforts, the Congregation established significant number of preschools, orphanages and Christian schools, implemented advanced methodological approaches and developed new curriculum for the Ukrainian children.

In their pedagogical activities, the Sisters Servants applied principles of humanization, consistency with nature, individual approach to the personality, reliance on the positives and the national character of education. As a Congregation leader, Sister Josaphata was deeply concerned with the teaching process in preschools and their financial provision. Moreover, she initiated the acquisition of pedagogical education for the teaching Sisters and cared for their constant professional improvement.

In addition to educational and spiritual mission, the Sisters Servants provided the medical care and assistance to the sick, poor, disabled and elderly. They ensured psycho-emotional support for their patients and offered various household services.

Therefore, active and sacrificial work of the Sisters Servants in Galicia resulted in the formation of the network of Ukrainian preschools, orphanages, and other educational institutions, strengthening the tradition of helping the elderly and sick.

Key words: *Josaphata Hordashevska, the Sisters Servants, social and educational activity in Galicia, Ukrainian preschool education*

Introduction

The struggle of the Ukrainians for their state independence has a long history and continues up to the present times of war against Russian aggression. Their national development historically occurred amidst political and cultural oppression. Therefore, the achievements made in the realm of national formation, cultural development and native language education were often the results of extensive public initiatives or the sacrificial activity of the distinguished representatives of the national religious communities and their spiritual leaders.

Monastic communities have been striving to preserve and develop Ukrainian culture, education, and social projects for several centuries. A special attention should be paid to the sacrificial educational and social activities of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, who have been recognized throughout the history as inspirers and promoters of cultural, educational, and national advancement of the Ukrainian nation. Sister Josaphata Hordashevska, their first sister and spiritual leader, made a unique contribution to the development

of the Congregation, especially in the areas of preschool education, caretaking and charitable work in rural Galician communities in the late 19th – the first half of the 20th century.

Social Prerequisites for the Establishment of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants and the Determination of Their Mission

During the specified period, the Ukrainian population of Galicia was in rather unfavorable social conditions. Consequently, these had a dramatic impact on the state of education and training of the Ukrainian children. Most Ukrainian youngsters were virtually excluded from the state educational system, and therefore their schooling was often limited to primary education. Preschool education for both urban and rural Ukrainian children was another crucial problem. There was no structured form of preschool education for rural children, which caused numerous problems during the summer season. At that particular time, parents were busy with full-time field work, leaving their children without proper care, attention, and supervision.

This situation deeply concerned Andrey Sheptytsky, the Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, who was actively involved in all spheres of public life. He knew that Ukrainians' moral and religious advancement would largely depend on structured educational and social work among children and women. He believed a systematic and skilled approach was necessary to address the needs for proper family education and childcare. Thus, he initiated the foundation of the Ukrainian women's monastic congregation capable of serving in childcare and education spheres. Among the monastic communities that existed at the time, only a few could successfully perform the functions of preschool education and care for rural children. The most widespread women's monastic association in Galicia was named after St. Basil the Great. However, due to financial obligations, entry into this Congregation was impossible for applicants from low-income families.

Thus, the establishment of the new congregation initiated by the Metropolitan A. Sheptytsky and two priests Kyrylo Seletsky and Jeremiah Lomnitsky was crucial and timely. Father K. Seletsky actively criticized the indifference of some clergymen to the miserable living conditions of the rural Ukrainian population due to poverty and deprivation. He advocated the importance of socio-cultural and economic improvements for the Ukrainian peasants in Galicia. His special attention was paid to women, who, in his opinion, played the important role in shaping new generations, and therefore women's Christian education was an essential task¹.

¹ Sapeliak, A. (2004). *Otets-prelat Kyrylo Seletskyi zasnovnyk monarshykh zghromadzen*. Lviv: Halytska vydavnycha spilka, p. 45.

The collaborative efforts of the above mentioned leaders led to the establishment of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate Congregation in 1892. Sisters' main activities included institutional development and teaching in preschool educational centers, catechization of young people, teaching liturgical singing etc. At the same time they were engaged in charitable initiatives such as caring for sick, disabled or those in need. The sisters also decorated churches and sewed clothes for priests.

Sister Josaphata Mykhailyna Hordashevskya became the first sister and later the superior and directress of the Congregation. Mykhailyna was born on November 23, 1869, in a poor large family of Lviv philistines. The girl's aspirations for monastic life induced her spiritual advisor, Father Lomnytsky, to send her to gain initial monastic experience in the community of Roman Catholic Sisters of the Felician Order. After a 14-month stay in Zhovkva Monastery of the Felician Sisters, Mykhailyna Hordashevskya became the first Sister Servant².

The first convent of the Congregation, where Mykhailyna Hordashevskya started her sacrificial spiritual and social service, was opened in the village of Zhuzhil. The constitution of the Sisters Servants Congregation of 1892 defined their priority tasks: to establish nursery schools for young rural children, provide care and service for the sick and poor, and prepare of the elderly for a pious death.

In the Congregation's rules of 1932, the scope of the sisters' social mission was significantly expanded and clarified: "the special purpose of the Congregation is to be vigilant in humble service for the glory of God and for the salvation of others, to educate children of both sexes in the preschool institutions, to accept orphaned girls and even orphaned boys (not older than 10 years old) into houses for boarding and education, to run public schools, to serve the sick and care for the decency and beauty of churches"³.

In order to reach the defined goals, the sisters provided various educational activities for rural residents. They conducted theoretical and practical classes on handicrafts, needlework, dressmaking and other traditional women's skills, organized meetings and lectures, encouraged communal prayers, distributed "good books", and offered professional medical care to the sick (nursing, disseminating basic knowledge of basic hygiene, setting up pharmacies, etc.)⁴.

As a leader of such an active community, Sister Josaphata strived to ensure that the Congregation would be "a light for the deprived children of Rus"⁵. The activity and dedication of the sister largely contributed to the successful functioning of the entire congregation and its significant achievements

² Velykyi, A. (1908). *Narys istorii zghromadzhennia sester Sluzhebnyts P.N.D.M.* Rym, p.31.

³ *Ustavy zghromadzhennia sester Sluzhebnyts NDM.* (1932), p. 1.

⁴ *Tebe Boha khvalym.* (1992). Rym, pp. 16–17.

⁵ *Molimosia z Blazhennoi Yosafatoi.* (2008). Lviv: Koleso., p. 6.

in the fields of education, national awareness, and social assistance to the Ukrainians.

The Contribution of Sister Josaphata Hordashevska to the Development of Preschool Education for Rural Ukrainian Children

One of the significant achievements of the Congregation and largely of Sister Josaphata was the opening of “zakhoronka” (ukr. nursery school or kindergarten) - the first Ukrainian preschool educational institution in Galicia on May 15, 1893 in the village of Zhuzhil⁶. This initiated further activities in the field of preschool education. Thus, in 1929 the sisters founded 39 “zakhoronkas”, where they educated 1,750 children⁷. More than four thousand students studied in 76 Christian schools established by the sisters in 1938 and 380 orphans found shelter in 15 orphanages. Four educational institutions under the guidance of the sisters were opened to educate only girls. In 1936, the Eparchy of Przemyśl had 33 “zakhoronkas” (nursery schools) with over 1,700 children. In addition to the newly established schools, there were also five seasonal (summer) schools, which enrolled about 350 children⁸. It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of World War II (1939) 524 sisters lived and worked in 102 monastery buildings⁹.

The development of the sisters’ preschool educational institutions was quite successful, it was even stipulated and declared in the statute of the Congregation that each monastery should establish “zakhoronka” for preschoolers. Nevertheless, the Sisters Servants had to overcome considerable difficulties, namely the lack of practical experience and qualified teaching staff, the lack of theoretical and methodological resources in Ukrainian, and, most importantly, the complicated socio-political and economic circumstances.

During the described period education in Galicia was controlled by a secular governing body, the School Regional Council, which required all preschool institutions to organize their education process on the basis of pedagogical concepts developed by the German educator Friedrich Froebel, the pioneer of public preschool education. Thus, the Council obliged all teaching nuns to obtain pedagogical training at special Froebel courses or get a quality state pedagogical education. As a result, the internal rules of the Congregation included sisters’ mandatory training in teaching and systemic teaching competence development. Younger sisters who had just entered the monastic

⁶ Seletskyi, K. *Dopys*. Dushpastyr, 1893, ch.12., p. 286.

⁷ *Zakhoronky*. (1929). Kalendar Misionaria, pp. 68–71.

⁸ Shematyzm hreko-katolytskoho dukhovenstva zluchenykh yeparkhii Peremyskoi, Sambirskoi i Sianitskoi na rik Bozhyi 1936. (1936). Peremyschl., pp. 136–139.

⁹ *Tebe Boha khvalym*. (1992). Rym., p. 22.

community were taught basic pedagogical knowledge along with religious education. The older sisters delivered for them a series of lectures and arranged practical classes on the theory and methods of preschool education.

To obtain higher pedagogical education, the Servant Sisters studied at Stanislav Yakhovych State Zakhoronka Seminary in Lviv or the Private Zakhoronka Seminary named after the Holy Martyr Josaphat, which was run by the Basilian Sisters. They also acquired theoretical and methodological knowledge in the field of preschool education at pedagogical courses organized by the Ukrainian Zakhoronka Society in Lviv, at the State Zakhoronka Seminary in Lviv or in the Higher Pedagogical Courses in Warsaw. According to Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, zakhoronkas (nursery schools) were "the beginning and the basis of the moral revival of the whole village and the rise of the religious life of the whole parish"¹⁰.

The Sisters Servants organized the educational process in zakhoronkas (nursery schools) on the base of catholic pedagogy. They defined religious and national education of children as their priority task. Consequently, zakhoronkas became the centers for the development of cultural life and the promotion of national values. "The nurseries of the Sisters Servants were important in preserving the national and cultural identity of the Ukrainians, particularly in the conditions of oppression of the national language, history, and culture. By educating children, the sisters indirectly had a positive impact on adults"¹¹.

Children were the "most precious treasure" for the Sisters, thus children's educational was one of their main responsibilities. The Statute of the Congregation indicated that established nursery schools ("zakhoronkas") were aimed at promoting the welfare of the youngsters, including their physical, cognitive, moral and esthetic development. It specified the means and methods of the educational process, hygienic and organizational requirements.

Proper arrangement of educational activities for the preschoolers required the sisters to have necessary psychological and pedagogical knowledge on teaching, to know proper methods and techniques, and to develop practical skills. Sister Josaphata expected the teaching sisters to prepare thoroughly for each lesson in the nursery schools. She believed that a good educator should teach children to pray, read to them religious books appropriate for their age, study and comment on biblical stories about the existence of God and angels; accept the most sacred communion with children and foster a love of church singing¹². She explained to the Sisters the organizational structure of a preschool education institution, the methodological principles of its educational process, and taught them children's songs, poems, and games. Moreover, despite serious

¹⁰ Krutii, K. *Ukrainski zakhoronky, ohorodtsi, svitlytsi ta pivoseli, abo z istorii doshkilnoi osvity v Halychyni* <http://surl.li/sdrji>

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² Slavuta, D. H. (1996). *Molytva i sluzhinnia. Biohraftia Sluhyni Bozhoi Yosafaty Hordashevskoi*. Toronto., p. 68.

financial difficulties, she bought musical instruments for the first nursery school (zakhoronka) to promote the harmonious children's personalities development and foster their musical abilities¹³.

All lessons taught in the established preschools were meant to be of an educational nature, perfectly adapted to the age, the level of a personality development, cognitive abilities and interests of a child. The curriculum consisted of religious instructions and practices, learning tasks, language development and logical thinking activities, observation and explanation of various phenomena and objects, reading and reciting poetry, listening to stories, drawing, crafting, singing, rhythmic gymnastics and playing active games¹⁴.

Teaching Sisters were used to develop their own curricula and teaching instructions. They skillfully combined the innovative pedagogical theory and practice of the time with their own ideas about the objectives and ways of educating the Ukrainian children. In their pedagogical activities, the Sisters Servants applied principles of humanization, consistency with nature, individual approach to the personality, reliance on the positives and the national character of education.

Striving to establish fruitful educational interaction with children, the Sisters Servants directly participated in all class activities. They believed it was the only way to provide a nurturing family environment of dedication and love, while having the possibility to closely monitor the children's behavior, health conditions, participations in games, attentiveness, diligence in learning, playing or work. They developed a particular progressive approach of the time in terms of preschool education – the differentiation of children into groups by their cognitive development, not only by their age.

These first Ukrainian preschool education institutions ("zakhoronkas") didn't have any financial support from the state. They were mostly financed by voluntary donations or charities. Consequently, when obtaining the permission for functioning, zakhoronkas often positioned themselves as charitable institutions in order to avoid regular visits of the state school authorities or suspension if the school didn't meet the state requirements. Termination of the Ukrainian preschools was usually explained by a rather controversial claim that the funding of educational institutions in the form of donations was detrimental to the dignity of the state¹⁵.

It should be mentioned that opening a nursery school was a rather difficult task. The school board required the founders to prepare an extensive list of documents to get the permission for functioning, namely: 1) the Voivodeship's (Polish province) resolution on the proper sanitary

¹³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁴ TDIAUL, f.179, op. 5, spr. 146, a. 140.

¹⁵ Fedorovych, K. (1924). *Ukrainski shkoly v Halychyni u svitli zakoniv i praktyk*. Lviv: nakladom sekretariativ ukrainskykh partii, p. 45.

and technical conditions of the premises; 2) a list of the material resources and teaching aids; 3) a yearly budget; 4) pedagogical education certificates of the teaching staff; 5) the personnel's citizenship validation; 6) the proves of the personnel's morality; and 7) the statute of the institution¹⁶. The educational experience and pedagogical education of the teaching staff were of particular attention and consideration. That was the reason why in most cases these requirements were not feasible for the Ukrainian monastic. As a result, the state school authorities usually treated educational "zakhoronkas" only as custodial humanitarian centers that provided moral and material support to children¹⁷.

The significant part of social and educational activity of the Sisters Servants was dedicated to the support of orphans. The orphanage in the city of Boryslav was one of the examples of this activity. The sisters opened this three-year vocational school of dressmaking and sewing in 1928 to ensure the social protection of orphans. In the school girls obtained vocational education, found the possibilities for future employment or the resources for financial security as adults. They studied vocational subjects alongside with general education classes such as Ukrainian language, history, religion studies, hygienic basics, and singing. According to the Sisters' catalogue of 1938, they were in charge of 15 orphanages in Galicia¹⁸.

Socio-Caretaking Activities of the Sisters Servants in Galicia

Besides the children care and education, the Sisters Servants initiated a number of activities for adult population. They read religious books to women in the parish on Sundays and holidays, spread evangelism wherever they could, and provided assistance to the poor and needy.

Their sacrificed activity was also visible in caring for the sick. This particular aspect was regulated in the very first regulations of the Congregation with as many as 19 chapters on the subject. Due to the poor financial situation, difficult working conditions, and the spread of infectious diseases, rural population of Galicia suffered from health problems and therefore needed regular medical care or basic sanitary and hygienic aid. Thus, this sphere of the Sisters' activity was determined by the objective preconditions. Their medical assistance was mostly based on herbal medicines, folk healing traditions, if they did not contradict common sense, patience, support, dedication, and mercy.

¹⁶ TDIAUL, f.179, op. 5, spr. 72, a. 3.

¹⁷ Parokhiialni zakhoronky. (1936). Lvivski arkhyieparkhialni vidomosti №12, pp. 145–147.

¹⁸ Kataloh Zghromadzhennia Sester Sluzhebnyts Neporochnoi Divy Marii na 1938 rik. (1938). Zhovkva.

The social and medical ministry of the sisters, like many other areas of their service, was initiated by the directress and founder of the Congregation Sister Josaphata Hordashevska. To improve the medical care and assistance, she purchased many books on medicinal plants. Together with other sisters, she used to pick up healing herbs, studied their therapeutic effects or the ways of preparation, and then distributed them to sick villagers. She studied all sorts of medical literature so that she could teach other sisters to provide assistance for the sick.

Sister Josaphata often visited sick people in the neighborhoods and, if necessary, in the remote areas. During her visits, in addition to medical care, she managed to accomplish a certain spiritual mission, encouraging the sick to pray and perform good deeds. People were touched by her dedication and called her “our kind doctor-sister”¹⁹.

Recognizing the limitations of herbal medicine, Sister Josaphata decided to ensure the professional medical training of the Sisters Servants. Having this in mind, she initiated the medical training of the Sisters in the main hospital of Lviv, where they could gain first-hand experience in nursing.

Josaphata Mykhailyna Hordashevska obtained a nursing diploma in 1899. She graduated from the State Medical School and completed a practical course in the Red Cross Society of Lviv state hospital. After passing the exam with distinction, she was certified to provide medical care to the sick and wounded in state hospitals and Red Cross centres²⁰.

In addition to delivering direct medical care, providing sanitary services to patients, following doctor's instructions or performing their own therapeutic duties, the nuns also ensured psycho-emotional support for patients, and offered household services (nutrition, hygiene routines etc.) In case of serious health problems the Sisters cooked meals to feed the patients and their relatives, cleaned the house, washed clothes, looked after domestic animals and did other necessary household chores. In extremely difficult cases the Sisters helped to prepare a patient for death, informed the priest, provided support to the family, and assisted in the funerals. Those who recovered from the illness were inspired to show gratitude to God, be careful and live a faithful life²¹.

Sister Josaphata owed her successes and achievements in ministry and service to God to her unique personal traits. The memoirs often described her as lively, energetic, cheerful, intelligent, hard-working, confident and determined person. She strictly adhered to the principles of Christian ethics and was particularly concerned about the moral and religious progress of her sisters. The virtue of obedience helped her accomplish numerous missions, demonstrate commitment and mercy, especially to the poor and sick,

¹⁹ Slavuta, D. H. (1996). *Molytva i sluzhinnia. Biohrafiiia Sluhyni Bozhoi Yosafaty Hordashevskoi*. Toronto., p.44.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

²¹ Velykyi, A. (1908). *Narys istorii zghromadzhennia sester Sluzhebnyts P.N.D.M.* Rym., p. 54.

care for people around, patiently endure poverty, hardship, insults, and even severe pain caused by a serious illness (tuberculosis of bones). As a leader of the Congregation, she never exhibited an authoritarian attitude, and when making decisions, was always interested in the opinions of others. She visited many newly established convents where she dealt with numerous organizational tasks, arranged charitable activities and, most importantly, set the example of sacrificial service for each new nunnery community.

Because of her exceptional personality she “was the heart and the pulse of the life in the Congregation”²², and as “a person of the great virtue...she was everything for everyone”²³. Fulfilling her calling, the Sister demonstrated sincere Christian faith and love for her native nation: “she worked tirelessly for the love of God and her people, and did not seek the recognition of others”²⁴. She expressed her love for God in sacrificial service to those in need, in all-embracing love for others, which became the best path to her own sanctification. Wishing good for others, communicating kindly, and doing good things – this was the meaning of Josaphata’s life – in the fulfillment of love, in the desire for holiness, and at the same time in complete harmony with herself²⁵. Her deeds demonstrated the example of a holy life, readiness to sacrifice, and tireless service to the needs of others²⁶.

Despite numerous challenges that Sister Josaphata faced in her service to God and Motherland, she constantly developed her spirit and personality, gained confidence and expertise. She dreamed of broader perspectives for the Congregation. In her opinion, the Sisters Servants were able to go beyond the scope of caregiving in the rural communities and expand their activities into wider domains of educating urban population. However, since her aspirations contradicted the rules of the Congregation, they could not be realized²⁷.

Over decades, the primary task of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate has shifted in both territorial and content terms. Emigration of the Ukrainians due to complex historical conditions at the beginning of the 20th century prompted the Sisters to expand their activities beyond the borders of Galicia. Consequently, the convents of the Sisters Servants were opened in Canada (1902), Yugoslavia (1906), Brazil (1911), and the USA (1938). By 1938, the Sisters Servants had 92 houses in Europe accommodating 494 sisters. They cared for 76 nursery schools with over 5000 children

²² Ibid., p. 38.

²³ Ibid., p. 128.

²⁴ Slavuta, D. H. (1996). *Molytva i sluzhinnia. Biohrafii Sluhyni Bozhoy Yosafaty Hordashevskoi*. Toronto., p. 53.

²⁵ Molimosia z Blazhennoi Yosafatoi. (2008). Lviv: Koleso, p. 7.

²⁶ Konstytutsiia i dyrektyvy zhromadzhennia SSNDM. (1982). Rym -Toronto, p. 17.

²⁷ Velykyi, A. (1908). *Narys istorii zhromadzhennia sester Sluzhebnyts P.N.D.M.* Rym, p. 133.

and 15 orphanages with 380 orphans. Additionally, they operated 3 public schools and engaged in various charitable actions in parishes²⁸.

The Soviet occupation terminated the development of the Congregation in Galicia. During the early years of Soviet rule, all convents were closed, many sisters were subjected to repression and deported to Siberia. Sisters' convents were also closed in Czechia and partially in Poland and Yugoslavia.

The co-founder and leader of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, Josaphata Hordashevska, passed away on April 7, 1919. During her lifetime, the Congregation established 40 centers with 400 sisters. The beatification process was completed in 2001 when Pope John Paul II proclaimed her blessed Josaphata Hordashevska.

Conclusion

Ukraine's state independence created conditions for the revival of religious life and the restoration of monasteries. Today, the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate continue developing their community and engaging in social and educational activities. They began working at the day care centers for children in Chervonohrad (2004) and Stryi (2008). Since 2007 a family-type orphanage has been operating at the convent of the Sisters Servants in Zolochiv, and the Social Center for orphaned girls was established in Lviv in 2013²⁹.

The educational, social, and charitable activities of the Sisters Servants had a broad scope of implementation both in the past and nowadays life of the Ukrainian nation. Thanks to such spiritually elevated, nationally conscious, capable of tireless social service and self-sacrifice personalities as Blessed Sister Josaphata Hordashevska, the Ukrainian people endured through difficult periods of oppression and adversity, preserved and enriched their national culture, developed the educational system, and upheld the traditions of philanthropy and charity.

Current social, economic, and education issues caused by the war in Ukraine have intensified volunteer and charitable efforts, requiring the widespread involvement of professionals in the field of psychological and pedagogical support to the affected individuals and engaging all who are concerned in providing them with financial and psychological assistance. Thus, the practice of selflessness and dedication is being revived in accordance with historical traditions.

²⁸ Sestry Sluzhebnytsi Neporochnoi Divy Marii. Relihiino-informatsiina sluzhba Ukrainy. <http://surl.li/sdrsb>.

²⁹ Vykhovna diialnist Sester Sluzhebnyts na pochatkakh stvorennia Zghromadzhennia. <http://surl.li/sdrke>.

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