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Saint Joseph's Foundation of the Polish Bishops' Conference

1. Context

In order to understand the need for the appointment, role and tasks of Saint Joseph's Foundation of the Polish Bishops' Conference (hereinafter referred to as "Foundation"), it is necessary to present an outline of the context of its establishment which, in practice, means the history of the structural reactions of the Polish Church to cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons by clergy or other persons officially connected with the institutions of the Polish Church (for example by vows, employment etc.). The turning point and actual beginning of these activities was June 2013, when the Episcopal Conference of Poland appointed Father Adam Żak SJ to the position of the coordinator of the KEP (Episcopal Conference of Poland) for the protection of children and youth. Unfortunately, this did not involve assigning him the appropriate institutional support (personal and material), which significantly influenced the

real possibilities of the coordinator's activities. Nevertheless, already in March 2014, Father Żak led to the establishment of the Child Protection Centre (hereinafter: COD) by the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. Since then, has been the substantive centre of the activities (especially related to the formation of Church personnel – not only clerics) in the field of safeguarding children and young people in the Church in Poland.

In the same year, in the month of October, the Polish Bishops' Conference adopted two significant documents which provided an initial organizational and legal framework for the activities of Church entities – both in response to crimes and – in an initial form – for preventive actions. These are *Guidelines for Initial Canonical Investigation in the Case of Clergy Allegations of Acts against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue with a Minor under the Age of 18* (*Wytyczne dotyczące wstępnego dochodzenia kanonicznego w przypadku oskarżeń duchownych o czyny przeciwko szóstemu przykazaniu Dekalogu z osobą niepełnoletnią poniżej osiemnastego roku życia*) and the document *Prevention of Sexual Abuse against Children, Adolescents and the Disabled in the Pastoral and Educational Work of the Church in Poland* (*Prewencja nadużyć seksualnych wobec dzieci i młodzieży i osób niepełnosprawnych w pracy duszpasterskiej i wychowawczej Kościoła w Polsce*). As a consequence of the approval of these *Guidelines*, in the following year the Church authorities in the dioceses and religious orders of men appointed delegates for the protection of children and youth and the chaplains of persons who have been abused. COD immediately started intensive training of persons appointed to perform these functions – still without a stable basis for financing these activities.

In August 2018, the decision of the Polish Bishops' Conference was made, obliging all dioceses to develop their own rules of responding to abuse and preventing sexual abuse in Church entities. In subsequent years, these documents were created – with a different level of details and specification of the actions that they imposed especially on clergy. They almost always did not indicate the source of financing for the activities that required it. In the following year (March 2019), the reaction and assistance system was supplemented by the appointment of the Polish Episcopal Conference of Archbishop Wojciech Polak as a Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth. Half a year later, the Office of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth in the building of the Secretariat of the Polish Bishops' Conference started working.

2. Establishment

During the six years which have passed from the appointment of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth, a particular problem was becoming clearer and clearer. Namely, the undertaken actions – for example, the functioning of COD, training courses etc. – did not have a stable financial basis. Funds had to be found *ad hoc*, whether thanks to the kindness of foreign entities, based on voluntary work or funding by local Churches (where there was often resistance to such actions). In the face of the increasing pressure of the public opinion, connected with well-known films raising the issue of the neglect of some Church authorities related to the safeguarding of children and young people, it has become clearer that there is a need to find a solution enabling stabilization and solid material support for aid actions for abuse survivors and prevention.

In this context, an idea emerged to establish a nationwide foundation which purpose would be to support the above-mentioned activities, and which would be financed by the clergy. Consequently, in October 2019, during the Plenary Assembly of the Episcopal Conference of Poland, the Polish bishops decided to establish “Fundacja Świętego Józefa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski” (“Saint Joseph's Foundation of the Polish Bishops' Conference”), approved its statute and method of financing, and chose its authorities¹. After registration in the National Court Register on January 7, 2020, the Foundation began its work.

3. Financing

The formal founder of the Foundation is the Polish Bishops' Conference. In practice, however, in accordance with the bishops' decision, actions of the Foundation are financed from the funds transferred annually by each diocese in proportion to the number of bishops and priests belonging to it (according to the arrangements of the KEP, these contributions are: PLN 2,000 from the bishop, PLN 150 from the presbyter). This adds up to a significant amount on a national scale – for instance, in 2020 the dioceses paid a total of PLN 3,539,874.50 into

¹ Polish Bishops' Conference, *Press release: 384th Plenary Assembly of the KEP*, 9.10.2019, <https://episkopat.pl/komunikat-z-384-zebrania-plenarnego-kep-zaktualizowane-zasady-formacji-kaplanskiej-i-decyzja-o-powolaniu-fundacji-swietego-jozefa/> (07.11.2021).

the Foundation's account. In the beginning, cooperation with the Foundation included only dioceses, but soon talks about the inclusion of the religious orders of men, and eventually also of the religious orders of women, were started. In March 2021, when the Conference of the Major Superiors of Religious Orders of Men in Poland and the Polish Bishops' Conference signed the *Declaration on the joining of men's orders in the cooperation with the Saint Joseph's Foundation of the Polish Bishops' Conference (Deklaracji o przystąpieniu zakonów męskich do współpracy z Fundacją Świętego Józefa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski)*, religious orders of men committed themselves to make annual contributions to the Foundation on behalf of religious priests working in Poland, calculated in the same way as in the case of the diocesan priests. Dioceses pay their contributions at the beginning of the calendar year, and men's orders at the end.

4. Supervision and board

In accordance with the Statute, the Foundation supervision is performed by the Presidium of the Polish Bishops' Conference, and the ongoing supervision by the Foundation Board (with a four-year term). The members of the Board serving for the first term are: Archbishop Wojciech Polak (chairman), Bishop Artur Miziński, Fr. Piotr Majer, Małgorzata Skórzewska-Amberg, Marcin Erenc, Fr. Adam Żak SJ. Up until February 2021, Robert Fidura (a survivor of sexual abuse by a clergyman) was also a member of the Board, but he resigned as a sign of protest against the inaction of the episcopate.

The Foundation's Management Board initially consisted of two persons – for the first three-year term, the KEP appointed Marta Titaniec and Fr. Tadeusz Michalik (after his resignation, this function was taken over by Fr. Grzegorz Strzelczyk in August 2020). As a result of the above-mentioned agreement between the KEP and religious orders of men, a third member joined the board in March 2021 – Fr. Janusz Łuczak SAC. The representative of the Management Board is the Director of the Office of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth, Fr. Piotr Studnicki.

5. Goals and main activities specified in the Statute

Having approved the statute, the founder, that is the Bishops' Conference of Poland, defined the goals of the Foundation. It is worth quoting them here *in extenso*:

1. "performing activities to protect children, adolescents and people with disabilities from sexual abuse;
2. conducting and organizing activities aimed at sensitizing the society and reacting to cases of abuse of children, adolescents and people with disabilities;
3. performing, supporting and promoting activities in order to form the principles of prevention of sexual abuse of children, adolescents and people with disabilities;
4. providing comprehensive assistance and support to people who have been harmed by sexual abuse as minors, in a state of disability or vulnerability, by clergy or other persons acting within the Catholic Church, in the institutions of the Catholic Church or as part of the caring, educational and pastoral activity of the Catholic Church;
5. supporting – as far as possible – people who have been harmed by sexual abuse as minors, in a state of disability or vulnerability, by people not connected institutionally with the Catholic Church."

It may be noticed that the objectives of the activities have been formulated in a very broad way and cover practically all aspects of the problem of sexual abuse and allow – which must be emphasized – the Foundation to perform preventive and supportive activities not only in connection with the crisis caused by crimes committed by clerics, but also in relation to the social problem of sexual abuse (therefore also regardless of the identity of the perpetrators). The Statute does not limit the Foundation's activities strictly to the territory of the Republic of Poland, what enables it to help the Churches in other countries (certain activities in this regard – with reference to the Churches in the countries of the former Soviet bloc – have already been taken).

It is also worth mentioning that Article 2 of the statute *expressis verbis* excludes from the activities of the Foundation "compensation payments or reparations for economic and non-economic damages caused to the harmed persons referred to in section 1 points 4 and 5, or to members of their families." On the

positive side, the tasks of the Foundation are defined in Article 3 of the statute, and it is also worth quoting the relevant passages *in extenso*:

1. “organizing, conducting and financing therapeutic, educational, psychological, legal and scholarship assistance to persons who have been harmed by sexual abuse as minors, in a state of disability or vulnerability;
2. organizing and financing regional assistance centres for the survivors, consultation points and helplines;
3. coordinating and financing therapeutic projects;
4. organizing and financing an educational and scholarship fund;
5. organizing, coordinating and financing educational and training activities, as well as taking preventive actions, which will be an adequate response to inappropriate behaviour related to the above-mentioned sexual abuse;
6. conducting charity actions;
7. organizing, conducting and financing conferences, congresses, trainings, courses, debates, presentations, talks, scientific workshops and lectures;
8. disseminating the goals of the Foundation on the Internet, in the mass media, in the form of TV or radio broadcasts, press articles and reports, interviews in the press, radio and television;
9. cooperation with the Church legal persons, in particular with the Founder, dioceses, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, public and private associations of the faithful, Caritas Polska and diocesan Caritas and other Church entities in the implementation and dissemination of the statutory goals of the Foundation;
10. cooperation with government administration bodies, local government administration bodies and other public administration entities, as well as social organizations, international institutions, legal and natural persons in the implementation and dissemination of the statutory goals of the Foundation.”

6. Coordinators of the Foundation

It would not be possible to achieve the very broadly defined goals and tasks of the Foundation only through activities conducted from the registered

office in Warsaw. Whilst taking this into consideration, Polish bishops, and then major religious superiors, appointed diocesan and religious coordinators whose task is to help people and institutions in the local Churches to obtain funds from the Foundation. In particular, the coordinator: informs the diocese/order about the Foundation's activities, encourages them to use the funds for preventive activities in the diocese/order, identifies local needs concerning help, prevention and the system of safeguarding minors in terms of the Foundation's goals, animates the activities of various Church environments concerning aid for survivors and prevention provided by the Foundation, inspires and supports the actions of Church entities offering assistance to the survivors with the support of the Foundation, collects information about the training needs of persons working with the survivors in the diocese/order to obtain funds for training from the Foundation, monitors the victim support system at the diocesan/religious level in order to improve it. This description is, of course, maximalistic in nature – it is difficult to claim that all coordinators meet the expectations expressed in it. Nevertheless, it expresses a certain ideal of supporting the activities of the Foundation's Management Board by the coordinators.

The database of the diocesan and religious coordinators can be found on the Foundation's website (fsj.org.pl).

7. Grants and the Foundation's own projects

The Foundation's activities can be presented well by dividing them into grant funding and the Foundation's own projects.

Grants

It is worth emphasizing that, by establishing the Foundation, the KEP did not intend that it would replace the activities of other entities in the field of survivor assistance and prevention of sexual abuse. Therefore, it was clear that in practice, one of the most important organizational challenges faced by the Management Board at the beginning of the Foundation's work would be the creation of a comprehensive, transparent and recipient-friendly grant system. The experience of the first months of work led to the creation of the first *Grant Regulations* in late 2020, which were in force through 2021, and then – after

evaluation – were updated and published in the revised version for 2022 (the regulations are available on the Foundation's website: fsj.org.pl).

Grants provided by the Foundation can be divided into 6 types (the consecutive chapters in the Regulations correspond to them):

- grants for persons who have been harmed and their relatives, especially family members (assistance in covering the costs of therapy, legal, educational or scholarship aid, assistance in covering the costs of therapy of people belonging to the closest circle of the hurt person, especially family members); both the survivors and Church entities (e.g. dioceses) may apply for funds on their behalf;
- grants to support people working directly with the harmed persons (funds may be used for psychological support such as supervision and for improving qualifications);
- grants to support the activities of delegates, coordinators, chaplains of persons who have been abused and guardians;
- grants to support preventive activities in the local Churches;
- grants to support the survivor support system in the local Churches (training and educational activities, creation and maintenance of help centres, consultation points, support groups for the harmed persons);
- grants to support scientific research in the field of protection of children and youth in the Church and assistance to the survivors.

The above-mentioned types of grants are awarded at the request of the interested persons or entities, after appropriate assessment of the legitimacy of the project. In addition, besides grant competitions, the Foundation finances the structural pillars of the system of reaction and protection of children and youth in the Church in Poland as needed, namely: the activities of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth and his Office; activities of the KEP Coordinator for the protection of children and youth; current activities and projects carried out by the Child Protection Centre at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow; actions of teams and expert groups appointed by the Delegate of the KEP.

When At the time that this text is being written, the Foundation's report for 2021 is not yet published/ready. However, in 2020 the Foundation paid for the therapy of 13 persons from 9 dioceses. 5 persons reported directly to the Foundation, and 8 persons were reported by the dioceses. As a result of talks, 1 diocese decided to finance the therapy of a harmed person. 10 people from 5 dioceses benefited from funding by the Foundation to help them in financing

their specialized postgraduate studies. Last year, these numbers increased significantly. The Foundation also finances two support groups for people who have been harmed by sexual violence in the Church. These support groups are run in Warsaw by the Initiative Wounded in the Church <https://zranieni.info/>, and in Krakow by the Foundation for Accompanying Family www.kuuzdrowieniu.pl.

The Foundation's own projects (presentation of the chosen ones)

In December 2020, the website www.zgloskrzywde.pl was launched, and it was prepared with the Office of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth. The site provides helpful information for people who have been sexually harmed in childhood or adolescence, or have knowledge of a harm or neglect, in clarifying of the matter in the Church. On the website, a telephone number and e-mail address (tel. 571 805 535, e-mail: zgloskrzywde@fsj.org.pl) are available for people who have tried to report harm to the Church but have experienced difficulties, and for people who may have comments on the Church's system of victim reporting and assistance. An employee of the Foundation is on duty by e-mail and phone.

At the turn of 2020 and 2021, the website www.wspolnotazezranymi.pl was created. It was prepared by the Foundation and the Office of the Delegate of the KEP for the protection of children and youth. The website is run in cooperation with the representatives of chaplains of sexual abuse survivors in the Church, by means of pastoral materials, prayers and testimonies, etc. which are posted on this website.

The Foundation financed the publishing of the following works: a collection of Church documents on the protection of minors (P. Studnicki, M. Dalgiewicz (red.), *Odpowiedź Kościoła na dramat wykorzystania seksualnego małoletnich. Dokument i komentarze*, Warszawa 2020) and a guide for confessors (T. Liszewski, K. Matuszewski, *Spowiednik wobec dramatu wykorzystania seksualnego. Poradnik*, Kraków 2021), which was created (substantially) at the request of the Foundation and was sent at the Foundation's expense to all parishes and male religious houses in Poland.

The project "Support for Diocesan Departments of Family Pastoral Care in the field of sexual abuse prevention" ("Wsparcie diecezjalnych Wydziałów Duszpasterstwa Rodzin w zakresie prewencji wykorzystania seksualnego") is the result of the cooperation between the Foundation and the Office of the Delegate of the KEP for the Protection of Children and Youth with the National Centre

for the Pastoral Care of Families of the KEP, within which the following activities are carried out: training of the Diocesan Family Chaplains and Diocesan Counsellors of Family Life during the Spring Session of the Centres for the Pastoral Care of Families (run by the Child Protection Centre); participation of one person working in the diocesan Centre for the Pastoral Care of Families in postgraduate studies in the prevention of sexual violence against children and youth at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow (Child Protection Centre), completion of specialist studies in the field of sexology or psychotraumatology by a person from the Centre for the Pastoral Care of Families from a given diocese. The costs of training and studies are borne by the Foundation, and the project was launched (started) in 2021.

A “Sisters for Sisters” (“Siostry dla Sióstr”) helpline was created as a result of the cooperation of the Foundation and the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious Congregations of Women in Poland. This helpline is intended for current and former sisters who need help either for themselves due to the sexual abuse experienced in the past or in the environment in which they work, or because they met a person who experienced this kind of violence. The costs of operating the helpline/telephone line, which has been operating from December 2021, are covered by the Foundation). Another initiative, “Sisters accompanying harmed persons” (“Siostry towarzyszące osobom zranionym”), was also established (the contact details of religious women who are on telephone duty and take calls from persons who have been harmed/ by sexual abuse, are available on the website wspolnotazezranionymi.pl/towarzyszenie/).

In December 2021, the Foundation published a new version of the *Grant Regulations*, containing updates based on the evaluation of activities conducted in the previous year. It seems that the grant function has started to work steadily. There is a remaining challenge to awaken the activity of entities in the dioceses and orders to undertake preventive measures – this is the least used tranche of the Foundation’s funds so far. Apart from that, this year, the management board of the Foundation will focus on its own further projects, especially in the field of prevention and support for the harmed persons.

(translation: s. Chiara Anna Burzyńska SSND)