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Activities of the Association of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Kraków during World War I

Associations of the Ladies of Charity of St Vincent de Paul were established in the Polish lands in the 1850s. One of the first association was founded in Kraków. The aim of this article is to present the activities of the Ladies of Charity and the Steward Maids [Panny Ekonomki] in the years before and during World War I. The members of the association provided the sick poor with emergency care such as making bandages or providing food and other daily necessities. In addition to material assistance, great emphasis was also placed on the religious aspect of the wards' lives. From the beginning of the 20th century, the Steward Maids concentrated on their work in the infirmary and, during the war, on organising nursing courses.

Keywords: association, Kraków, charity, religiosity, women

The aim of this article is to give an overview of the charitable activities of the Association of Ladies of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Kraków during the First World War and in the preceding years. The source basis for the study is the association's reports from the years 1867–1916 and a report in an abbreviated form, contained in the magazine *Miłosierdzie Chrześcijańskie* [Christian Mercy] in 1918. The activities of the St. Vincent de Paul Association of Ladies of Charity in Kraków have not been widely reported so far. It has only been mentioned in more general studies relating to charity in Galicia or in Kraków itself. Slightly more space is devoted to the activities of ladies in the inter-war period.¹ This issue also features prominently in biographies of individuals associated with the association, such as Sister Magdalena Maria Epstein² or Anna

¹ K. Krzysztofek, *Stowarzyszenia katolickie w Krakowie w latach 1918–1939*, Kraków 2014.

² U. Perkowska, *Ty, Panie, wskazujesz mi drogę życia. S. Magdalena Maria Epstein*, Kraków 2005.

Rydlówna.³ The origins of Polish nursing and the contribution of the association's members to its development are then placed in the centre.⁴ The association is then the starting point for further considerations.

I. Origin of the existence of the Association of the Ladies of Charity

The Societies of the Ladies of Charity were initiated in France, in the first half of the 17th century. They were officially recognised by Pope Innocent XIII in 1695.⁵ Their establishment was possible thanks to the activity of Vincent de Paul, founder of the "Confraternity of Charity". It associated women who wanted to help the poor and the sick. Earlier works of Vincent de Paul, recognised by the Holy See, were the male Congregation of the Mission and the female Congregation of the Sisters of Charity, which over time became active all over the world, including Poland. The Daughters of Charity arrived in Poland in the 17th century thanks to Queen Ludwika Gonzaga, and from then on they steadily expanded their activities. At the time of the partitions, the congregation on Polish soil was organised in four provinces. Initially, the seat of the authorities of the Galician Province, established in 1787, was Lviv, but in 1859 it was decided to move it to Kraków. This was dictated by the desire to coordinate the work of the sisters with the activities of the Kraków missionary priests. The relocation of the Central House became possible thanks to the commitment of Bishop Ludwik Łętowski.⁶

The second half of the 19th century saw a turnaround in attitudes towards destitution and the impoverished in all the partitions. There was a strong development of grassroots work to educate society and to save it from poverty. Attention was paid to the plight of the poorest sections of society, especially the urban population. Efforts were made to improve the situation of the homeless and orphans, and the establishment of more shelters, workhouses and orphanages was funded. The financial support of philanthropists was also available to monasteries, which included care for the deprived as part of their operation. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, new religious congregations were also

³ U. Perkowska, *Anna Rydlówna (1884–1949): organizatorka szkolnictwa pielęgniarskiego, działaczka społeczna i niepodległościowa*, Kraków 2010.

⁴ *Dzieje pielęgniarstwa w Krakowie*, ed. K. Zahradniczek, Kraków 2011.

⁵ P. Gługła, *Z dziejów Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo w Tarnowie w latach 1872–1949*, „Resovia Sacra. Studia Teologiczno-Filozoficzne Diecezji Rzeszowskiej” 2009, 16, p. 232.

⁶ *Historia prowincji krakowskiej*, „Szarytki”, https://www.krakow.szarytki.pl/?page_id=10623 [access: 15.01.2023].

established, and in Kraków alone the help for the poor was provided by a Franciscan, Albert Chmielowski, founder of the Albertine Sisters and Brothers. Over time, charity took on the form of a fashionable occupation – it was not appropriate to be uncharitable.⁷

The activities of numerous charitable groups, including Vincentian Family, fitted perfectly into this trend. The heyday of the Associations of the Ladies of Charity on Polish soil was in the 1840s and 1850s. The first ones were established successively in Lviv, Poznań, Warsaw and Kraków. The initiators were usually people of noble birth, often involved in grassroots work, such as Celestyna Działyńska and Tytus Działyński in Great Poland (Wielkopolska).⁸ The profile of the Associations' activities in the above-mentioned towns was almost identical – close cooperation with the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paulo, visits to the homes of the poor and the sick and material support were undertaken. As important as the dressing of wounds and the distribution of food was the promotion of Christianity. Signs of devotion to the faith, the sacraments and the Mass, are mentioned in the reports on a par with the material aspects of charity.

It should be mentioned here that the association, during its existence, did not have a strictly formalised name from the beginning – the word 'association'

⁷ The issue of philanthropy was raised by, among others: E. Barnaś-Baran, *Dobroczynność i filantropia w społecznościach wielokulturowej Galicji* [in:] *Mysł i praktyka edukacyjna w obliczu zmian cywilizacyjnych*, t. 1, *Człowiek i wychowanie w perspektywie wieloetnicznej i wielokulturowej*, ed. K. Szmyd, E. Barnaś-Baran, E. Dolata, A. Śniegulska, Rzeszów 2012; M. Brenk, *Działalność dobroczynna i filantropijna na ziemiach polskich w czasie niewoli narodowej. Zarys problematyki* [in:] *Pomoc – wsparcie – ratownictwo. O optymalizacji rozwoju i edukacji człowieka na różnych etapach życia*, ed. A. Knocińska, P. Frąckowiak, Poznań–Gniezno 2017; N. Budzyńska, *Brat Albert. Biografia*, Kraków 2022; *Dobroczynność i pomoc społeczna na ziemiach polskich w XIX, XX i na początku XXI wieku*, ed. M. Przeniosło, Kielce 2008; J. Domańska, *Dobroczynność względem sierot na ziemiach polskich do 1918 roku*, „Biuletyn Historii i Wychowania” 2011, no. 27; A. Haratyk, *Rozwój opieki nad dziećmi i młodzieżą w Galicji doby autonomicznej*, Warszawa 2002; E. Leś, *Od filantropii do pomocniczości. Studium porównawcze rozwoju i działalności organizacji społecznych*, Warszawa 2000; idem, *Zarys historii dobroczynności i filantropii w Polsce*, Warszawa 2001; E. Mazur, *Dobroczynność w Warszawie w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1999; M. Piotrowska-Marchewa, *Nędzarze i filantropi. Problem ubóstwa w polskiej opinii publicznej w latach 1815–1863*, Toruń 2004; M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *Moda na dobroczynność w wieku XIX* [in:] *Życie prywatne Polaków w XIX wieku*, t. 6, „Moda i styl życia”, ed. J. Kita, M. Korybut-Marciniak, Łódź–Olsztyn 2017; D. Raś, *Rodziny ubogie i przestępczość od XVI do XX wieku. Warunki życia, badania psychologiczno-społeczne, dobroczynność i wychowanie młodzieży*, Kraków 2011.

⁸ W. Umiński, *Działalność dobroczynna ziemian na przykładzie Towarzystwa św. Wincetego a Paulo na terenie Wielkopolski drugiej połowy XIX wieku*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 2016, vol. 125; A. Baran, *Oddziaływanie kapucynów warszawskich na kobiety w dobie międzypowstaniowej (1831–1864)*, „Nasza Przeszłość” 2019, vol. 131.

was used interchangeably with ‘society’, often even within a single report. In Lviv it was registered under the name of the Society of the Ladies of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. The Kraków reports from 1867 to 1917 were also published using the term ‘society’. A change occurs in 1928, when the report for 1927 was issued under the name ‘association’ and it is this form that is considered appropriate.⁹

The Kraków Association of the Ladies of Charity was founded in 1855 and five years later was incorporated into the central management based in Paris. After six years it was finally recognised by the Church authorities and the Governor’s Commission. Father Wiktor Ożarowski became the first director of the association, while Felicja Wężykowa, wife of the senator-castellan Franciszek Wężyk (1785–1862), became its president.¹⁰ The association constituted a response to the difficult situation of the poorer social strata, for whom the state could not provide sufficient assistance.

Kraków at the turn of the 20th century was no longer the neglected city of the early days of autonomy. It was one of the fastest growing urban centres of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in terms of population. The dynamic increase in population was mainly due to the expansion of the city’s boundaries and the influx of people from smaller towns.¹¹ The fortress of Kraków was not without influence on its development. In order to supply the army, a number of factories and workshops were established in the city, employing the inhabitants.¹² As the city developed, the number of deprived residents increased, especially in the poorer districts of Kraków – in Kleparz, Stradom or Kazimierz. The problem was particularly acute for orphans, the sick and the elderly, with few sources of income. They were most often looked after by convents, supported in their activities by lay associations, such as the Charitable Society (Towarzystwo Dobroczynności). Their members focused on facilitating access to health services and education, attempted to find vacant places in shelters and orphanages, and provided material assistance.¹³

Lay and religious activities complemented each other, as exemplified by the collaboration of missionary priests, Sisters of Mercy and the Ladies of Charity Associations. Helping the poor and the suffering was, according to the 1866

⁹ K. Krzysztofek, op. cit. p. 183.

¹⁰ J. Gaworzewski, *Przez 75 lat pracy Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo w Krakowie (1855–1930)*, Kraków 1930, pp. 11–12.

¹¹ *Dzieje Krakowa*, vol. 3: *Kraków w latach 1796–1918*, ed. J. Bieniarzówna, J.M. Małecki, J. Mitkowski, Kraków–Wrocław 1985, p. 314.

¹² A. Chwalba, *Festung Krakau. Kraków w cieniu twierdzy (1850–1914)*, Kraków 2022, p. 294.

¹³ E. Barnaś-Baran, *Wychowanie moralne i religijne ubogich i sierot w Krakowskim Towarzystwie Dobroczynności w latach 1816–1918*, „Studia Pedagogica Ignatiana” 2016, 19 (2), p. 67.

report, to bring their members closer to Christ, to enable them to follow him and to see God in others: “According to the laws of the Society, some of the members, the Ladies themselves, visit the poor, carry and distribute support to them, in order to imitate the love of Jesus Christ, who (...) descended down to our lowliness for the relief of our misery” (transl. mine).¹⁴ They were to be strengthened in a more spiritual experience of providing assistance by the Sisters of Mercy, who visited the homes of the sick with them.¹⁵ Membership in the association was also associated with the possibility of obtaining plenary and partial indulgences.¹⁶

The management board, i.e. the Council of the Ladies of Charity Association of St. Vincent de Paul, each time consisted of a priest director (as an inspector on behalf of the missionary priests), responsible for preparing and presenting reports on activities to the Bishop of Kraków. In the first years of the association’s existence, a great role was also played by the Visitor of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Maria Talbot, who helped to lay the foundations of the organisation.¹⁷ The ladies were governed by statutes, which specified the amount of due contributions they paid and the rules for the functioning of the association. The dues depended on the function performed – in 1866 it was 20 guilders for the contributing ladies, at least 4 guilders from the visiting ladies and 20 cents from Panny Ekonomki [Steward Maids] (literally: unmarried women able to thriftily manage a household or an estate).¹⁸

Presidents and vice-presidents (in Polish first *prezesowe*, *wiceprezesowe*, later *prezydentki*, *wiceprezydentki*) and secretaries were recruited from both aristocratic and landed gentry women, less commonly, from townswomen, the wives of professors and politicians known in the society. Other members came mainly from the townswomen and landed gentry – including numerous countesses and countesses’ daughters. Often mothers with their daughters and daughters-in-law enrolled in the association. The president and vice-president coordinated the work of the association and the secretaries were responsible for recording the activities of the ladies. They summarised the activities undertaken and the amount of contributions.¹⁹ The superior of the Sisters of Mercy in a given parish became the chief treasurer of the association.²⁰

¹⁴ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia 1866 do 1 stycznia 1867 r.*, Kraków 1867, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Mały Podręcznik Pań Miłosierdzia. Przekład z francuskiego*, Kraków 1914, pp. 85–87.

¹⁷ J. Gaworzewski, *op. cit.* p. 12.

¹⁸ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo...*, Kraków 1867, pp. 2–4.

¹⁹ *Mały Podręcznik Pań Miłosierdzia...*, pp. 77, 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Despite the purported motivation of piety, generosity and faith of the women involved, membership in an association was often simply to break the monotony of everyday life. Membership in the numerous organisations established in larger and smaller urban centres provided the opportunity to make new friends and to feel 'useful'.²¹ It also had a prestigious dimension, as it was in good taste to support the poor, although usually such activities had little in common with the evangelically gratuitous alms-giving. In the case of the association in question at the beginning of the twentieth century, lists of members and donors were printed in the reports, together with the exact amounts of the offerings.

Steward Maids [Panny Ekonomki] accepted unmarried girls and women into their group. They were formally subordinate to the director, but had their own board of trustees consisting of a chairwoman, a vice-chairwoman and a treasurer. At the beginning of the 20th century, it also included housekeepers (in Polish: *szafarka*), vice-housekeepers, treasurers, sub-treasurers, secretaries and vice-secretaries.

II. Activities before the war

Initially, the activities of the Ladies of Charity were limited mainly to visiting the sick, which was in fact included in the name of the association (Society/ Association of the Ladies of Charity of St Vincent de Paul for the Poor and the Sick in Kraków). They did this together with the nuns – the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paulo, or rather they helped them. The data in the reports show that, compared with the visits of the sisters, the visits of the ladies were much less frequent – their number sometimes did not exceed one per year for each of the members. The extent of the disparity in the number of visits can be seen from the fact that in 1870 the sisters visited 3465 patients, while the ladies visited only 554.²² This trend continued throughout the years of the association's activities.

In addition, the women provided their wards with the necessities of life – clothing of various kinds, coal, paraffin and food. Funds for this assistance were raised from various sources. The women were obliged to pay an annual contribution, but this only accounted for part of the budget. Much more money was raised through collections at churches and cemeteries during festive periods. Funds were also raised at balls and parties, and through cans displayed in churches. Not insignificant were the one-off larger donations made by members

²¹ J. Hoff, *Czas wolny mieszkanek miasta galicyjskiego w XIX w.* [in:] *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego*, ed. A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarz, Warszawa 1997, p. 89.

²² *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia 1870 r. do dnia 1 stycznia 1871 r.*, Kraków 1871, p. 16.

of Kraków's elite. They were usually earmarked for a specific purpose – the education of an orphaned child or the purchase of coal. At the beginning of the 20th century, the association also drew money from the bequests of deceased members and supporters. Countesses Stadnicka and Zofia Wodzicka from the 1890s onwards are listed among those who bequeathed part of their estate to the poor, as is Mrs Buol since 1904.²³ In addition to financial support, the ladies received gifts in kind – vegetables, milk, etc. – for the benefit of their wards. It also happened that pharmacists donated medicines for the poor, not requiring any reimbursement from the association.

In addition to material assistance, described by the visiting priest as an activity with 'blessed effects', the association also cared for the spiritual life of its wards. Particular emphasis was placed on 'straightening out families' who were not living according to Christian standards. A separate issue was the catechisation of children, usually the orphaned ones, who were placed in orphanages by the ladies in the early 20th century. They also made sure that the sick and dying in their care were provided with the sacraments, and thus had the opportunity to confess, receive Holy Communion or the sacrament of the sick. The number of Holy Communion and baptisms were documented. The deceased wards were also not forgotten as Masses, booked for the peace of their souls, were paid for from the association's funds.²⁴

From the beginning of their documented existence, the Steward Maids helped mainly by sewing clothes and linen for the poor. From 1909 onwards, two sections are mentioned – the making of clothes for the poor and the preparation of dressings, later renamed as the section for caring for the sick and the sewing section for sewing.²⁵ The latter had the task of making and procuring clothes. Members of the first-aid section assisted the sisters and doctors in the infirmary, which opened in 1909. The experience gained there and the desire of the women to improve their skills contributed to the launch, even before the war, of 'Samaritan courses'. They were free of charge and did not give the participants the right to practice their profession. In 1911, on the initiative of Maria Epstein, president of the Steward Maids, with the scientific support of professors from the Jagiellonian University, the School of Certified Nurses of the Steward Maids

²³ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia 1891 r. do dnia 1 stycznia 1892 r.*, Kraków 1892; *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia 1904 r. do dnia 1 stycznia 1905 r.*, Kraków 1905.

²⁴ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie za rok 1913*, Kraków 1914, p. 6.

²⁵ *Sprawozdanie jubileuszowe Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla Ubogich Chorych w Krakowie: z czynności tegoż Towarzystwa w okresie upłynionych lat 50-ciu*, Kraków 1910, p. 20.

of St. Vincent de Paul.²⁶ It was launched thanks to the kindness of the Sisters of Charity, the Kraków intelligentsia and the determination of the Steward Maids who themselves raised the funds to prepare the school building.²⁷

III. War

On the eve of the Great War, the director of the work was Father Kasper Słomiński, while the Ladies of Charity Association was headed by Princess Teresa Lubomirska. The ladies were then divided into smaller groups, which were headed by faculty ladies. In addition, there was a separate board for the shelter for the poor, i.e. the St Vincent's Home, which consisted of the following ladies: Maria Morawska, Anna Chylińska, Countess Paula Ledóchowska, Duchess Olga Ponińska, Maria Kossakowa, Włodzimiera Szołajska, Duchess Pelagia Radziwiłłowa, Countess Maria Żółtowska and Maria Gubarzewska.²⁸

In the year preceding the war, the Steward Ladies had formed three sections – the sewing one, headed by Maria Epstein; the one caring for the sick, headed by Maria Wiszniewska; and, comprising some of the members of the first two groups, one for visiting the sick in hospital, headed by Countess Katarzyna Potocka. Its participants kept company with the sick, read to them, and after a while also set up a small library and made books available to patients.

The outbreak of the war complicated the functioning of the association – so much so that for 1914 only the Steward Maids provided a detailed report, including commentary and a list of members. The reports for the following two years, 1915 and 1916, outlined the difficulties the members had to face. The biggest problems were money and lack of manpower. During the first years of the war, as the front cyclically approached and moved away from the city, the population was evacuated.²⁹ Most of the ladies then found themselves outside Kraków, often in remote areas of the Empire.

The turbulent years 1914–1915 were reflected in the number of patients visited by the ladies. The report for 1916 already shows a partial stabilisation of the situation in Kraków, and in 1917, despite the still ongoing hostilities, the number of visits considerably exceeds those in 1913.

²⁶ U. Perkowska, *Ty, Panie, wskazujesz mi drogę życia*, s. 51–52.

²⁷ L. Płaszewska-Żywko, *Szkoła Zawodowych Pielęgniarek Stowarzyszenia PP. Ekonomek św. Wincentego a Paulo w Krakowie i jej działalność w latach 1911–1921* [in:] *Dzieje pielęgniarstwa w Krakowie*, ed. K. Zahradniczek, Kraków 2011, p. 229.

²⁸ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo...*, Kraków 1914, p. 9.

²⁹ *Dzieje Krakowa*, p. 314.

Table 1. Number of patients visited by members of the Association in the successive years.

Year	Number of visits
1913	1084
1914	947
1915	585
1916	1106
1917	1484
1918	2057

Own elaboration based on: *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie...*, Kraków 1914 – 1917; *Sprawozdanie Pań Miłosierdzia w Krakowie*, „Miłosierdzie Chrześcijańskie” 1918, vol. 132, no. 40, pp. 45–47, J. Gaworzewski, *Przez 75 lat pracy Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Węścienczego a Paulo w Krakowie (1855–1930)*, Kraków 1930, p. 68.

The poorhouse continued to operate, although not without difficulties, as the guardians were only able to guarantee one room for the tenants due to dwindling resources. In view of the high cost of living in the city, the decreasing amount of contributions paid by the members was particularly devastating. The lack of social events and therefore opportunities for fundraising and the rapid impoverishment of society meant that there was an increasing number of people in need, with no financial resources to help them. Of great importance at that time were the funds bequeathed by deceased donors, who before the war included: Countess Zofia Wodzicka, Countess Stadnicka, Mrs Buol, Olimpia Jankowska, Countess Felicja Koźmianowa, Countess Celina Potocka and Wacław Mańkowski. The amounts of these bequests did not exceed 1,000 crowns, although there were larger donations, such as those made in 1916 through the Sienkiewicz Committee (6216 crowns) and from Erich von Diller (1,000 crowns).³⁰

In spite of the warfare that was still ongoing, 1916 proved to be a breakthrough year and resulted in new ventures for the association. One of these was the “Drop of Milk” campaign, dedicated to mothers of children up to the age of one (however, in *Księga Pamiątkowa trzechsetlecia Zgromadzenia Księża Misjonarzy [The Book of Remembrance of the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the Congregation of Missionary Fathers]*, the year 1914 is considered the beginning

³⁰ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia do dnia 31 grudnia 1916 roku*, Kraków 1917, p. 6.

of the campaign³¹). Based on contributions, anonymous monetary offerings and material donations, the distribution of condensed milk to the needy was organised. The initiative was popular and after a while it was extended to Kazimierz district and combined with free medical consultations. In 1917, the distribution of milk also began for older children up to the age of two, but was discontinued in July due to its unavailability. In 1916, 400 infants received nourishment every day, and the following year the number increased to 636.³² The idea was taken from the Kingdom of Poland, where establishments of this type had already been thriving since the beginning of the 20th century. The first “Milk Drops” stations were established in Łódź and Warsaw in 1904.³³ The Kraków station was headed by Duchess Teresa Lubomirska, assisted by Countess Maria Mieroszowska, Maria Rettingerowa, Maria Gubarzewska and Countess Aniela Ponińska.³⁴

A particularly joyful and important event, as emphasised in the reports, was the establishment of a branch of the Association in Dębniaki near Kraków (now a district of Kraków) under the leadership of Ludwika Krzeszowa-Męcina, wife of the painter Józef Krzesz-Męcina. In the first year of the war, she and her husband left Kraków and settled in Prague, where they both became involved in charity work – Józef in the Committee for Aid to Refugees,³⁵ Ludwika in the Prague Association of Ladies of Charity. In 1916 they returned to the villa in Dębniaki, where Ludwika took charge of organising relief for the poor. The association in Dębniaki officially started on 13 April, with thirty-five members who had to pay one crown per month for the membership. To start its activities, the Dębniaki branch received financial assistance of 200 crowns from the Association in Kraków. In turn, the General Committee for Assistance to War Victims in Poland (Vevey Committee) donated a substantial amount of 1000 francs.³⁶

From its inception, the association in Dębniaki was divided into three sections – charity, job placement, collection of medicinal herbs, and two workshops

³¹ *Księga Pamiątkowa trzechsetlecia Zgromadzenia Księży Misjonarzy (1625–1925)*, Kraków 1925, p. 273.

³² *Sprawozdanie Pań Miłosierdzia w Krakowie*, „Miłosierdzie Chrześcijańskie” 1918, vol. 132, no. 40, p. 46.

³³ A. Bołdyrew, *Żłobki i stacje „Kropla Mleka” jako placówki wspierające ubogie rodziny w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, „Wychowanie w Rodzinie” 2016, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 113–114.

³⁴ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo...*, Kraków 1917, p. 15.

³⁵ R. Jodłowska, *Krzesz-Męcina Józef Feliks*, „Internetowy Polski Słownik Biograficzny”, <https://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/jozef-feliks-krzesz-mecina-1860-1934-malarz> [access: 12.11.2022].

³⁶ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo...*, Kraków 1917, p. 12.

– straw shoe making and a sewing room. The board of directors, apart from Ludwika Krzeszowa, consisted of Father Karol Słowiczek as director and the ladies – Maria Kirchmajerowa as deputy, Leopoldyna Schmidtowa as treasurer, Wiktoria Klockówna as secretary and Helena Toroniowa as deputy secretary.³⁷

The various sections of the branch took on an activity profile similar to that of the main association in Kraków. The charity section was involved in distributing milk to up to 45 children a day. In addition, efforts were made to distribute basic foodstuffs such as flour and groats to the needy. The section's tasks also included caring for orphaned children, who were placed in shelters and orphanages.

The job placement section already managed to help twenty people in its first year, regardless of their health. The section was headed by Mrs. Sierkiewiczowa. The sewing section, on the other hand, had an educational profile – local girls learned sewing and garment repair under the supervision of older women. The herb-gathering section and the straw shoe-making section were temporary and aimed at young people who were “wandering without work”. Thanks to these initiatives, it was possible to collect herbs and make more than thirty pairs of shoes.³⁸

An extremely important value, guiding the ladies working in the association, was Christian mercy, which was repeatedly emphasised in the reports. It could not have been otherwise, due to the close cooperation with the Sisters of Mercy. The strong attachment to faith is certainly evidenced by the fact that religious practices were also present during work – sewing clothes was combined with listening to the Scriptures and related teachings, preached by one of the priests. Women and girls starting Samaritan courses took a spiritual retreat of several days. The custom of organising days of recollection was also tried to be maintained during the war. When it was not possible to hold the retreat in the autumn of 1914, it was moved to the spring of the following year. Monthly Masses and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, especially during Lent, were also important events worth noting in the reports.

Although during the war more emphasis was placed on the practical aspect of Christian charity, the ladies also continued to try to care for the spirituality of their wards. The reports from this period still include lists of the number of received Holy Communions, baptisms or people provided with the sacraments.

From the available data it can be inferred that the greatest emphasis was placed on the provision of the sacraments for the sick; confessions and Holy Communion were received in similar numbers, while the number of legitimate

³⁷ Ibid, p. 12.

³⁸ *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo...*, Kraków 1917, pp. 12–13.

marriages and baptisms, which were more difficult to organise under wartime conditions, declined. Despite the many war-related expenses, attention was still paid to saying Masses for the dead of the poor, with 73 to 117 crowns allocated annually for this purpose. In addition, a certain amount of money was allocated each year for a cabman to drive the priest to the sick.

Table 2. Spiritual care for the sick and the needy

Year	Baptisms	Confessions and Holy Communion	„Authorised marriages”	Sacraments of the sick	Masses for the deceased of the poor (amount of contributions)
1913	7	885	20	84	96 crowns
1914	2	1013	20	94	105 crowns
1915	2	1004	3	40	73 crowns
1916	-	1078	2	62	117 crowns
1917	3	-	4	-	-
1918	-	-	4	-	-

Own elaboration based on: *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie...*, Kraków 1914–1917, J. Gaworzewski, *Przez 75 lat pracy Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo w Krakowie (1855–1930)*, Kraków 1930, p. 68.

The time of the First World War further marked the distinctiveness of the Steward Maids from the rest of the association (some of them had completed their two-year training at the School of Certified Nurses) as they experienced the hardships of war to the greatest extent. The young women went to the front, e.g. to the Kingdom, where they assisted doctors in military hospitals. There they cared for both soldiers and civilians suffering from infectious diseases. Some of them paid for their dedication with their lives, as was the case with Stanisława Klimuntowa, one of the participants of the Samaritan course, who contracted typhoid fever in Bielcza and died. Those who remained in Kraków worked in the infirmary and in the city’s military hospitals.

At the same time, teaching at the nurses’ school continued all the time, although classes were organised with difficulty due to lack of resources. The school’s teachers included both lay people and the Sisters of Mercy. Also in the organisation of learning at the school, the major role of religion and the Church was evident. The surviving minutes of the Board show that the visiting priest and, somewhat less frequently, the Sisters of Mercy attended its meetings. Religion was also among the subjects included in the final examination: “(...) it was resolved at the request of Prof. Dr. [Stanisław] Dobrowolski that at the final

examination the Rev. Visitor Słomiński has the right to put questions on religion encompassed by nursing".³⁹ The atmosphere of piety in the school was fostered by the founding Steward Maids themselves. Both Maria Epstein and Anna Rydlówna were deeply religious and involved in the life of the Church. Maria Epstein considered the Catholic profile of the teaching of future nurses to be one of the strengths of the school.⁴⁰ Even during the war, Rydlówna endeavoured to coordinate the activities of the Circle of the Children of Mary, in which young people met regularly for conversation and prayer, and regularly attended Mass.

While the war halted the activities of the Association in Kraków, it contributed to the creation of new units of the Association in the surrounding areas. In 1915, cooperation was established with the Princely-Episcopal Committee (K.B.K),⁴¹ set up by the Bishop of Kraków, Adam Stefan Sapieha. Steward Maids set off in convoys supplied with essentials for the needy: medicines, food and clothing were transported, and at the same time the Association's reach was extended.⁴² From the same year there are references to rural girls becoming members in local associations. The number of members did not exceed twenty, and the directors were usually parish priests. Individual Steward Maids played a major role in establishing new branches, and over time the reach of these associations expanded a great deal. The girls in Tenczynek, working under the leadership of Katarzyna Potocka, may serve as an example. The association in Albigowa near Łańcut, on the other hand, was formed on the initiative of Maria Piątkowska, a professional nurse. In Zabiała and Ruda Różaniecka, the initiator of the Associations was Father Kudzia, chaplain on behalf of the Princely-Episcopal Committee.

IV. Further history of the association

From among the members of the Association of the Ladies of Charity and especially the Steward Maids grew up figures who are still important to the Catholic Church today – Maria Epstein entered the Dominican Order after the war, taking the name Magdalena Maria. She is now recognised as a Servant of God and patroness of those fighting epidemics, and her beatification process is underway.

³⁹ Quoted from: L. Płaszewska-Żywko, *Szkoła Zawodowych Pielęgniarek Stowarzyszenia PP. Ekonomek św. Wincentego a Paulo w Krakowie...*, p. 258.

⁴⁰ U. Perkowska, *Ty, Panie, wskazujesz mi drogę życia...*, p. 61.

⁴¹ A common name, the committee was officially registered as the Cracow Bishop's Committee for Relief to Those Affected by the War Disaster.

⁴² *Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo dla ubogich chorych w Krakowie od dnia 1 stycznia 1915 r. do 31 grudnia 1915 r.*, Kraków 1916, p. 19–20.

The wartime experience of Magdalena Maria Epstein and her closest associates contributed to the development of Polish nursing – in post-war Poland, the University School of Nursing and Health Care Workers was established at the Jagiellonian University, which was facilitated by the cooperation established with the Rockefeller Foundation. The first director, until 1931, was Maria Epstein. Among the teachers were the former Steward Maids, Anna Rydlówna and Teresa Kulczyńska, who, after Maria left to join the Order, took up the posts of headmistress and vice-headmistress.⁴³ The school gradually acquired a more secular character and had more in common with the academic community than with the parent Society of the Ladies of Charity.

The association survived the First World War and continued its activities until its liquidation at the beginning of the 1950s. During the inter-war period, it developed its structures – its activities covered the entire Kraków metropolis. In Kraków itself, too, the association created branches with their own boards, corresponding to individual districts of the city. As during the time of war, the ladies took care of the sick and children by collecting money, distributing clothing and food. They also continued to care for the spiritual development of their wards and, following the example of the association's branch in Dębniki, helped them to find employment. Established during the war, the branches within the Kraków metropolis area, with varying lengths of time of their operation, sometimes provided assistance to the poor for only a few years. New, usually parish-based units were constantly emerging as a result of the activities of The Princely-Episcopal Committee members.

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⁴³ L. Płaszewska-Żywko, *Powstanie i rozwój Uniwersyteckiej Szkoły Pielęgniarek i Higienistek w latach 1925–1950* [in:] *Dzieje pielęgniarstwa w Krakowie*, ed. J. Zahradniczek, Kraków 2011, p. 292.

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Działalność Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo w Krakowie w latach I wojny światowej

Streszczenie

Stowarzyszenia Pań Miłosierdzia św. Wincentego a Paulo powstawały na ziemiach polskich od lat 50. XIX w. Jedno z pierwszych utworzono w Krakowie. Artykuł ma na celu przybliżyć działalność pań miłosierdzia oraz pań ekonomek w latach poprzedzających I wojnę światową oraz w jej trakcie. Członkinie stowarzyszenia udzielały ubogim chorym doraźnej pomocy, takiej jak wykonywanie opatrunków czy dostarczanie żywności i innych artykułów codziennego użytku. Poza pomocą materialną duży nacisk kładziono również na religijny aspekt życia podopiecznych. Panny ekonomki od początku XX w. skupiały się na pracy w ambulatorium, a w czasie wojny na organizowaniu kursów pielęgniarskich.

Słowa kluczowe: stowarzyszenie, Kraków, dobroczynność, religijność, kobiety