

# ŻEŃSKIE ZGROMADZENIA ZAKONNE W POLSCE 1939-1947

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## SUMMARY

The Congregation of the Servants of the Most Holy Virgin Mary was founded by a Great Poland landowner, Edmund Bojanowski, in Podgórze near Gostyń, Great Poland, on May 3, 1850. Already in the year 1866 the sisters were transferred to the Silesian town of Poręba near Mount St. Anne in the Strzelce district. From the very beginning the congregation's activity has been multidirectional, encompassing within its reach children, youth, the ill and needy. At the outbreak of World War II the congregation was organized into two provinces: a) the Leśnica province, with headquarters in Leśnica Opolska near Mount St. Anne (district of Strzelce Opolskie), b) and the Panewniki province with its headquarters in Panewniki outside of Katowice. The congregation was directed at this time by Mother General Demetria Cebula and a general council, and the provinces were run by provincial superiors. The headquarters of the general administration were located in Leśnica along with the provincial administration. Because of the joint headquarters, the provincial administration of Leśnica was strictly tied with the general administration, and, thus, the power wielded by the provincial superior in Leśnica was merely theoretical. The provincial administration in Panewniki functioned differently. From the moment of its founding in 1923 it wielded power independently, though at the same time it was subordinate to the Mother General. In the period discussed one general chapter was held in 1943, with the task of electing a new administration and discussing current congregation affairs. Each province had its own, separate novitiates. In the Leśnica province, the novitiate was located in Poręba, and in the Panewniki province, the novitiate was based in Panewniki itself. When Poręba was occupied by the Gestapo in June of 1941, the novitiate was transferred to Strzelce Opolskie where it remained until the end of the war. In the Panewniki province novices were last accepted into the novitiate on July 23, 1940. From August 15, 1941 to October 17, 1945, the novitiate did not exist as a result of an order issued by the occupying powers which dealt with the acceptance of new members into the congregation.

The fates of the two provinces during the war were played out rather uniquely. The outbreak of WW II caught the congregation in full bloom. On September 1, 1939 the Leśnica province numbered 148 homes and 941 sisters and the Panewniki province numbered 48 homes and 419 sisters. Aside from this, about 50 sisters were engaged in field work on the territory where a German province was to be established after the war. The Leśnica province carried out work with the ill in about 130 houses, directed preschools and shelters in about 90, schools and home economics handicraft courses in about 40, and homes for the elderly in about 20. In addition to the above mentioned spheres of work, the servants directed a clinic for mothers with children, ran milk kitchens, they took care of infants and worked in hospitals. The sisters of the Panewniki province aided the ill in 30 of their homes, ran shelters in 26; clinics and milk kitchens in 7, soup kitchens in 2, schools and home economics courses in 21. In addition, they worked in 11 hospitals and 1 sanatorium.

Right from the first days of war the activity of the congregation was subject to limitations which took place in several stages. First, the German authorities decided to fire sister-nurses working in local hospitals and Brotherhood Societies, hiring in their places sisters of the NSV. In the Panewniki province almost 200 sisters were deprived of work and a roof over their heads. Nearly all pre-schools were liquidated and the sisters were prevented from working with youth. In addition to these limitations of activity which had a greater on the Panewniki province, the houses in this province were taken in by the decree concerning confiscation of church

property. On the territory of Leśnica province 3 homes were occupied by the German authorities: a) the home of St. Klara in Leśnica (headquarters of the general administration), on November 13, 1940; b) the home of St. Władysław on Mt. St. Anne, in 1941; c) the home in Poręba – central point for the servants working in Silesia, on June 19, 1941. The sisters were forced to leave those homes mentioned and returned to them only after the front had been pushed back in 1945.

In January of 1941 in the Panewniki province the occupying authorities took over the administration of 18 of the congregation's homes. Only the provincial home in Panewniki and the oldest provincial outpost in Skrzyszów were not liquidated. In 1943 the secret police took over the provincial home in Panewniki. Those homes of which administration was taken over by the authorities received so-called commissariat administrators who oversaw the sisters' work. As a result of pressure from the occupying powers, the sisters were forced either entirely or at least partially desert the occupied homes. The occupying powers dealt with other church homes and social-charity organizations in the same way. For example, up to January 1, 1943, 13 homes in the Panewniki district were totally liquidated. Bases on the deeds of these homes it is also possible to note the losses suffered by the congregation as a result of military action: a) In the Leśnica province, totally destroyed were: 7 congregation homes, 7 church homes, 1 hospital, 2 private homes. Partially destroyed – 17 congregation homes, 4 church homes, 1 hospital and 1 state home; b) In the Panewniki province 3 homes were totally destroyed and 3 homes were 70% destroyed.

Despite the war, the congregation opened up a dozen or so new outposts. In this way the congregation did not lose its livelihood during the war period and tried to carry on its work in various areas of social and religious life. A significant group of sisters was employed in military hospitals in order to nurse wounded soldiers. A new sphere of work was that in parish chancelleries, work as organists and sacristans. Already at this time the sisters undertook the catechization of children.

Together with the pushing West of the front, about 200 sisters working in military hospitals were evacuated to inland Germany. These sisters were posed with two possibilities – to remain on the new territories or return. Those who felt themselves to be Germans chose to stay; others returned after a few months. As a result of the establishment of new political borders and the Potsdam agreements, a group of sisters was resettled in Germany. This fact led to the creation of a separate German province with headquarters in Berlin-Weissensee, and, after a few years, of a second province in Köln-Junkersdorf.



## SUMMARY

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Jadwiga was founded in Wrocław on June 14, 1859. Its founder was Father Robert Spiske, canon of the Wrocław cathedral and called by his contemporaries „the apostle of love”. The model for the congregation was the Princess of the Silesian lands, Saint Jadwiga, who from a young age served the Polish people of Silesia. The sphere of activity of the newly-founded congregation encompassed three goals: a) the upbringing of neglected and deserted children, b) the care of morally threatened young girls, c) the nursing of the elderly, and sick both in and outside of the home. The fate of this congregation developing at first in Silesia above all was conditioned by the region's political and socioeconomic relations. The first blow to strike the congregation was the so-called „Kulturkampf” – orders issued by the Prussian authorities on the basis of a decree from May, 1875 led to the liquidation of all guardian establishments (except for 1 outpost in Bardo Śląskie/wish escaped this fate) together with the general home in Wrocław. The sisters expelled from Silesia in 1879 made their way to Niezamyślice in Morawy (territory of the Olomouc diocese) where they commenced charity work. This led to the foundation of a Czech province (approved in 1914). Political considerations led to the differentiation of the following provinces. Before the outbreak of WW II the congregation encompassed 80 outposts scattered among 4 provinces (Lower Silesian Province founded in 1859, Czech province founded in 1914, Katowice province founded in 1924, and the Danish province founded in 1929). The number of sisters in the entire congregation reached 811 people.

The Lower Silesian province was directly subordinate to the Mother General, Augustyna Schmidt; the other 3 provinces had separate provincial administrations. Together with the political changes arising in Poland after the end of WW II, there was a reorganization and re-Polonization of religious institutions. At that time all Silesian sisters born of Polish families and having a command of the Polish language received Polish citizenship. The remaining 181 sisters who could not prove Polish origin and did not have a relative Polish command of the Polish language were resettled to Germany, where they opened up a new so-called German province of the congregation with headquarters in West Berlin. The general administration was transferred to this province in 1946, from which time on the St. Jadwiga home became a provincial home and the role of superior of the Wrocław province was filled by Mother Maria Meller.

In 1939 the province numbered 27 homes and 290 sisters; in 1945 – 27 homes and 314 sisters; in 1947 – 13 homes and 84 sisters. As a result of military action 2 homes were totally destroyed (in Głogów and in Wrocław on Starca St.). The mother home located on Sep-Szarzyński St. in Wrocław underwent significant destruction, along with the congregational archives which it housed. Many deeds were irreversibly lost. In the period 1939-1945 – 22 sisters died; in 1945-1947 – 8 sisters. In 1939 the province ran four guardian establishments for children and morally-neglected youth, 12 guardian and recreational homes for orphans, 11 shelters, 16 pre-schools and 3 schools. During the war years the sisters of St. Jadwiga provided material and spiritual aid to all those in need. They nursed the ill and wounded in the hospital in Polanica-Zdrój and in the provisional hospital in Czarnewy. In 8 homes they offered care for the elderly. They also conducted 8 recreational homes for adults and children. Moreover, the Sisters of St. Jadwiga worked in clinics: general clinic, anti-tuberculosis clinics and clinics for mothers. In addition they nursed the ill in private homes. In the years 1945-1947 the congregation ran 1 hospital in Polanica, 3 care homes and 3 recreational homes. The most common form of social aid they offered was nursing of the ill in private homes. Yet another sphere of the sisters' activity was parish work, where the sisters served as catechists, sacristans and served in parish chancelleries. In the years 1939-1945 the congregation carried out work at 5 parish outposts; in the period 1945-1947 it took on work of this type at 6 new outposts.

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## SUMMARY

The Katowice province of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Jadwiga arose as a result of political changes that took place after World War I. In the year 1921 when a part of Silesia was returned to Poland 4 outposts of the sisters of St. Jadwiga were separated from the mother home by a political border. At this time church authorities began to make attempts at creation of a separate province. On October 31, 1922 a vice-province arose; and on July 3, 1924 by the authority of a decree of Pope Pius XI the Katowice province was created with its administration headquarters and novitiate in Katowice-Bogucice. Mother Berchmana Szopa served as provincial superior.

In 1939 the province, numbering 15 outposts and 154 sisters (of which, 142 were professed nuns and 22 were novices), was governed by Mother Honorata Split. In 1941 German authorities proposed to those sisters working in the outpost and school in Katowice-Bogucice a transfer to a secular order as a condition for continuation of their upbringing work. As a result of refusing this proposal sisters of the congregation were evacuated from the home on Leopold St. in Katowice on October, 14, 1941. From this time on the provincial administration did not have permanent headquarters; Mother Honorata Split resided in Dąbrowka Mała at the beginning, and later in the home for missionary priests located on Płot St. No 3, in Katowice.

In the years 1939-1941 sisters were temporarily evacuated from 6 homes, and removed from 6 other provincial outposts until 1942. During the period 1940-1942 the congregation's work encompassed 3 new outposts (2 homes for the elderly and a anti-tuberculosis sanatorium in Rabsztyn). Provost homes, private homes and private religious homes or the religious homes of other congregations served as new places of residence and work for those sisters removed from their own outposts. In the period up to 1942 due to the evacuation from the provincial home and due to repression by the occupying authorities which the sisters underwent, Mother General Augustyna Schmidt transferred 35 sisters from the Katowice province to other outposts subordinate to themselves (i.e. to the Lower Silesia Province). In 1943 she accepted 9 new sisters for a temporary period with the aim of preparing them for their eternal vows.

In 1945 sisters returned to 10 homes, which demanded fundamental repairs. During the war period 3 of the congregation's homes suffered significant damage. After the close of war the province owned 15 homes and numbered 115 sisters; in 1947 – 21 homes (of which 5 homes were located in the Lower Silesia province) and 153 sisters. During the war 3 sisters were taken away to the camp in Bojanów. In the years 1939-1945 10 sisters died (4 as a result of military action, and 6 of a natural death); and in the years 1945-1947 3 sisters died. The province's activity up to the outbreak of war was directed towards educational-upbringing work and care work. The sisters managed, among others, 3 guardian establishments, 1 general school, 13 pre-schools, 1 day-nursery, 3 care stations for mothers and children, 5 homes for the elderly, and 5 anti-tuberculosis stations. During the war the congregation's educational work was systematically liquidated by the occupying authorities. First, they liquidated all pre-schools, then all guardian establishments. Emergency activity imposed on the sisters by the occupying authorities consisted of care for evacuated youth from the depths of Germany and nursing of Germans suffering from tuberculosis (at a sanatorium in Rabsztyn). Parishes became new places of activity for the sisters who served there as sacristans, catechists, organists and worked in the chancelleries. After the war the congregation's upbringing educational work was renewed. The sisters took on work in schools and upbringing establishments. Moreover, they expanded their sphere of activity in parishes by taking on the catechization of youth, work which they began during the war.

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## SUMMARY

This paper, whose aim is to present the activities of the congregation of Sisters of Immaculate Mary during the years 1939-1947, is based on source materials found in the Vatican Archives and in the provincial archives in Wrocław, Brancie and Katowice. The Congregation of Sisters of Immaculate Mary is genetically connected with the territory of Lower Silesia, especially with the capital of Silesia, Wrocław, where it began its existence in 1854. The congregation's founder was Father Jan Schneider who came from the most Polish territory of then Prussian Silesia, from Mieszkowice near Prudnik. The congregation's primary goal was the widely-comprehended work with morally-threatened young girls from the very rapidly developing Wrocław area. This activity was especially directed at work with household maids, the conducting of station missions, and care for elderly maids who at that time did not have social security. Its next task was the growth of active educational and social work, and widespread work in diverse spheres of health service. At the outbreak of WW II the congregation was organized into 4 provinces: Wrocław province, with headquarters in Bardo Śląskie; Brandenburg province, with headquarters in Berlin; Brancie province, with headquarters in Brancie; and Katowice province with headquarters in Katowice. The General Home was located in Wrocław and the role of Mother General was filled by Kłotyda (Marta) Mende, assisted by her general council. The remaining provinces were administered by provincial superiors. At the outbreak of war the Mother General took on direct control of the Katowice province.

In the period discussed the congregation underwent a painful maturity process, when in February of 1943 the German police arrested the Mother General for hiding Polish priest, Walter Gaska; for which she spent 10 months in a Wrocław prison. In 1944 the general chapter elected a new general administration for the congregation. Roswitha (Anna) Mix became the new Mother General. The congregation owned 2 novitiates. The Katowice province had its own Polish novitiate, with its headquarters located in Brzezine, Rybnik district. The novitiate in Nysa prepared novices for the remaining 3 provinces. As early as April 3, 1940 the novices from the Polish novitiates were transferred to the novitiate in Nysa since the Polish novitiate was not allowed to remain in existence. The novitiate in Nysa existed until September 12, 1944. When the war drew to a close, 2 novitiates were opened: one in Poznań for the Katowice province in 1946, and one in Bardo Śląskie for the Wrocław and Brancie provinces.

In 1939 the congregation numbered 119 homes, of which 50 belonged to the Wrocław province, 37 to the Brancie province, 10 to the Katowice province, and 22 to the Brandenburg province (of which 3 were located on the territory of present-day Poland). As a result of military activity 5 homes of the Wrocław province were totally destroyed; of this number, 3 were located in Wrocław (including the general home) and 2 in the Oleśnica district (more specifically, in Brzezina Łąka and Zawidowice). Soon after the war ended, 8 partially-damaged homes were liquidated. Two homes – in Wschów and Legnica – which were opened during the war, were of a temporary character.

In total the Wrocław province lost 14 homes, with a majority of the remaining homes (37) demanding repair in 1945. The Brancie province liquidated 6 homes which were totally destroyed during the war. They were located in the Głubczyce district: in Bliszczycze, Nowa Cerekiew, Posusice, Wojnowice, Boguchwałów, Sucha Psina. At the end of 1945 7 more outposts were liquidated as a result of seriously damaged state of

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the homes. During the occupation period 2 homes in the Katowice province were liquidated: in Jastrzębie-Zdrój and Świerklany, and a private home owned by the congregation in Poznań underwent serious damage. In 1947 2 new homes were opened in Bydgoszcz and Łódź in the hope of further growth of the province. In this year sisters of the Katowice province worked in 10 homes, since all the existent homes once again became property of the province.

In 1939 the congregation numbered 720 members working on the territory of present-day Poland. The painful experiences of 1945 brought with them a large number of deaths. Three sisters were shot to death, five buried alive in the rubble and 2 perished as they attempted to escape. The causes of death of 27 other sisters in 1945 were typhoid fever, tuberculosis and heart attacks. In total 141 sisters died in the period discussed (of this number 57 died in the years 1945-1947). In the years 1939-1945 the congregation dismissed 18 professed nuns and 2 novices. At the same time 11 professed nuns and 5 novices voluntarily left the order. As a result of military action the majority of sisters were forced to leave the order, very often along with their wards. Sisters were evacuated from 25 homes in the Wrocław province and from 23 homes in the Brancie province. At the end of the war it was difficult to determine the number of sisters in each of the provinces. In 1947 the Wrocław province numbered 143 sisters, the Brancie province – 154, the Katowice province – 65 sisters.

In 1939 in line with its work with young girls, the congregation ran 6 shelters which served to help find work, 6 outposts which cooperated with the Katowice Station Mission, 12 care homes for the elderly, sick, overworked servants. The sisters extended their educational-guardian work by conducting 3 economic schools; 46 of their outposts organized courses for young girls in the sphere of work for women. In addition the congregation ran 5 orphanages, 10 shelters, 47 pre-schools, 22 care homes for infants in the form of day-nurseries and health stations for mothers and children. In the sphere of aid to the sick, suffering and deserted, the sisters worked in 5 hospitals, 2 sanatoriums, 98 outposts which nursed the sick, and 15 homes for the elderly. The congregation also extended aid to the poor, organizing for them kitchens which provided free meals.

All this activity was put to a stop during the war. At the moment of Hitler's invasion on Poland the outpost in Katowice which to a large extent was in cooperation with the Station Mission was forced to dissolve its shelter for young girls and the home was occupied by German officials. The rest of the shelters were liquidated in 1945. In 1941 the home economic school in Wrocław was shut down, at which time the entire school building and boarding house for girls were taken over by the German army, which later located its radioengineers there. Home economic courses for girls were conducted in Wrocław until 1944. Educational-guardian activity among pre-school children was interrupted in 1941. The congregation had to hand over 29 pre-schools to the NSV. In the period 1939-1945 the 234 sisters worked in 30 hospitals serving sick and wounded soldiers. From 1942 on 1,500 sick soldiers were located in the Brancie hospital, who were attended to by 60 sisters. The majority of the 1,500 sick were mentally liquidated by the German authorities as a worthless and unproductive social element. In March 1945 almost all sisters working in psychiatric hospitals in Brancie were evacuated to Czechoslovakia, as was the case with the majority of homes in the Brancie province. During military action the congregation's homes were overflowing with refugees searching for shelter and medical care.

After the war the Wrocław province was deprived of the chance to realize the goals put forward by its founder because the shelters for young girls, employment centers and Station Mission were not in functioning order. The sisters undertook new work dictated by the needs of the time: they opened 2 boarding houses for young girls, 6 pre-schools, 1 orphanage, 1 day-care center, and 9 homes for the elderly. All provincial homes carried out field work with the sick and also began working in church parishes. After military action wound down the Brancie province directed its energy toward nursing the sick in the Brancie psychiatric hospital; moreover, in 25 homes they cared for the ill, brought up children in 5 pre-schools, looked after the elderly in one home, and conducted home economic courses in another (in 1947). In 1947 the Katowice province ran 1 economic school along with a boarding house, 5 pre-schools, 2 homes for the elderly, 2 day-care centers and 6 outposts which were engaged in nursing the ill in their homes. Moreover, the sisters worked in 2 hospitals and in 1 outpatient center at a steelworks. During the occupation the sisters did not lose their service attitude when it came to helping the needy independent of their nationality. Wartime destruction, mass migration of the population, evacuation and resettlement, in addition to large number of deaths among the sisters all contributed to weakening the vigor of the congregation, which it enjoyed until 1939.

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