

SUMMARY

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Nursing, care and education activity of female congregations in Płock diocese in the context of health and social situation in the years 1925-1939

INTRODUCTION

In the interwar period the diocese of Płock, located in the north of Mazovian district, was assessed as a neglected area in economic, social, but also in sanitary and, consequently, in health terms. Difficult living and working conditions, poverty, low awareness of prophylaxis and hygiene, and non-compliance to hygienic principles were the causes of spreading infectious diseases and related to this fact - high mortality rates. The number of medical personnel, as well as public health institutions and hospitals in the diocese was insufficient. There was a shortage of physicians, nurses, and midwives. Therefore, the inhabitants of these areas were supported by the work of nuns of various congregations, who throughout the interwar period constituted the majority of nursing and care personnel in local hospitals and shelters. In the Diocese of Płock, sisters of the Congregation of the Passionist Sisters and of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paulo worked in hospitals. In the face of the mentioned difficult social situation in the diocese of Płock, the problem of orphanhood appeared, not only biological, but also social. To meet these needs, religious sisters tried to take care of abandoned and neglected children, which was also connected with care and educational activities as a special goal of congregations. Institutions where sisters took action were orphanages, day care centers, educational institutions, and schools. Among congregations of the Diocese of Płock, the Congregation of Servant Sisters of Mary Immaculate and the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy had the greatest impact in solving social issues.

PURPOSE OF WORK

The aim of this study was to present the nursing, caring, and educational activities of the congregations of the Płock diocese in the interwar period.

The time span of the work is 1925-1939. The beginning of the time span is connected with the administrative borders of the Płock diocese, while the end of the time span is marked by the outbreak of World War II.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Archives, Polish national and local periodicals, as well as printed sources and studies were used as sources for the preparation of this dissertation. The leading source was the archival material from the congregations' archives, which made it possible to obtain information on the origins, structure, organization, and development of the congregations, the rules and activities that were defined in them, and the biographical data of the sisters contained in their personal files.

An important supplement were the materials collected in the archives of hospitals of the Diocese of Płock and the documentation in the resources of the national archives of the diocese and the Archive of New Files, which allowed to learn about the economic, demographic, epidemiological, sanitary, and social situation. Statistical yearbooks proved to be indispensable in verifying and supplementing the data contained in the archives. Also, a search of periodicals was conducted, first of all, those published during the period in question, but also those from later years, which described earlier events. Useful for the presentation of the situation at that time, the organizational and legislative solutions, and the functioning of congregations in the conditions of the interwar period, were also printed sources, including compact books, laws, regulations, circulars, instructions, and reports found in the library collections of church and state institutions. Studies on individual congregations were a valuable source for completing the narrative of this dissertation. In addition, other studies on the economic, health, and social situation and monographs on the history of hospitals and other institutions where sisters worked.

In describing the activities of religious congregations in the Płock diocese, the method used was the study of documents, including their analysis and criticism of the contents of periodicals.

RESULTS

Religious congregations of the Diocese of Płock had a specific profile of activity. It concerned the care of the sick and children, which resulted from the current situation and was in line with the needs of society. They were related to environmental and health conditions, taking into account economic conditions, sanitary condition, epidemiological situation, including infectious and social diseases and social situation. Identification of problems and needs allowed to set directions of activity for religious congregations. Sisters prepared themselves to perform nursing and caring-educational tasks. They were educated

in nursing, pedagogical, and other schools, as well as on courses, gaining qualifications and competencies that allowed them to fulfill their tasks.

The Passionist and Grey Nuns constituted the majority of the nursing staff in the hospitals of the diocese and in the shelters. Their work focused on the sick (often bedridden), the suffering and the neglected, who needed not only care, but also treatment, nursing and spiritual support. Initially, care activities were of a social and ideological nature, but as needs and demands grew and the epidemiological situation became an occupational activity. Religious sisters classified in the professional group "nurses and sisters of mercy" carried out professional tasks in the hospital. They had two dimensions - assisting the doctor in work related to the examination and treatment of patients and independent work. It consisted of providing direct patient care, focusing on solving the patient's nursing problems and meeting deficits of needs in the physical and mental spheres, depending on the clinical condition. Patient nursing also included performing prescribed treatments and administering medications. In addition, sisters were assigned administrative and economic tasks related to the functioning of the hospital. They worked in the pharmacy, X-ray room, physical therapy room, and in the housekeeping department. The work often took place in difficult conditions and was a great challenge for the sisters.

During the research period, the number of nursing sisters increased due to the development of hospitals, the creation of new wards, and greater needs arising from the dynamic epidemiological situation. There were also more and more qualified sisters, which was reflected in the professional performance of professional tasks. This translated into better effects of work - improvement of hygienic behaviour among patients, adherence to the sanitary regime, which was particularly important in the case of social/infectious diseases, raising awareness of compliance with medical recommendations, attention to proper nutrition. Sisters' professionalism, experience, but also conscientiousness in caring for patients and attention

to the organization of work, the state of the hospital and its development were increasing.

The Passionist and Grey Nuns ran shelters in the diocese for the poor, the sick, the elderly, and often the homeless. They tried to create a home-like environment for their guests. Through the sisters' sacrificial work, the lot of the poorest inhabitants of the diocese could improve.

Among congregations of women of the Diocese of Plock, the Congregation of the Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Virgin Mary had the greatest share in solving social issues. Servant Sisters were engaged in work related to care and education of children and youth. This work

was shaped over the years depending on social needs, based on the changing structure of social welfare at that time, its legal basis and means of action, as well as educational law and its guidelines. The sisters ran orphanages, day-care centers, and preschools, but also worked in schools in response to current social needs. The orphanages/preschools, as opposed to shelters/ orphanages that gathered children living in the family home and staying in the institution for several hours of study and play, were run under the direction of kindergarten teachers. This work required pedagogical and organizational skills. The result was the creation of conditions for young people to get an education and acquire professional skills.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The demographic-geographical and environmental-health conditions of the Diocese of Plock determined the tasks of religious congregations in the struggle against social and infectious diseases, poverty and orphanhood.
2. Due to the insufficient number of state and local government institutions, their tasks were supplemented by establishments/institutions (hospitals, shelters, orphanages/preschools, schools and others) created by charitable organizations and by religious congregations.
3. The activities of religious congregations in the diocese (Passionists, Daughters of Charity, Servants of Charity and Sisters of Mercy) resulted from their charism, which was defined by the constitutions of each congregation, but also required professional preparation.
4. The implementation of the nursing and caring tasks of religious congregations contributed to the improvement of sanitary conditions and epidemiological indicators, such as decreased mortality, incidence, and morbidity.
5. Care and educational activities involving children, including orphans, and young people could bring tangible benefits to society in the long run, through the acquisition of education and professional skills.

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