

Tadeusz Wrona
Polish President's Advisor
Czestochowa, May 5th, 2010

Cooperation of self-government authorities with Catholic Action

Catholic Action in general definition concerns the apostolate of laity and in the more detailed one Catholic organizations being a form of this apostolate aiming at evangelism of the world, adjusting to conditions of particular countries formed in accordance with guidelines of Pius XI.

In the period between the wars Catholic Action carried on varied activities, first of all the one deepening religious and social awareness of its members. It included Holy Masses, recollections, evangelism and catechism short meetings, congresses, councils, lectures, in which it was taught how to read various current events according to Catholic rules. Sports events, trips, camps, artistic shows were also very popular. Catholic Action influenced the society, organizing religious lectures, charity actions, propagating Catholic press and films. The Church did not want directly and actively to participate in politics and other spheres of life, but arranging the world following Gospel rules it wished to create proper conditions to graft in a human supernatural life. Catholic Action in the period between the wars also undertook various public actions, e.g. the protest against the project of codification of marriage law prepared by prof. W. Lutosławski.

After the war renewing its activity Catholic Action's aims were not subjected to substantial changes, although on the one hand possibilities of activity increased (TV, Internet, mobile phones), but on the other – threats emerging from them also intensified.

As far as the subject discussed today is concerned, the duty of participation of lay Catholics in public life is precised in art. 9, pt. 2 of Catholic Action's in Poland statute, which states: Catholic Action fulfills its goals by, among others, educating Catholic activists and instruct them for active social, economical, cultural and political life. We know many good examples of such work.

Well shaped Catholic Action's members apply to self-government authorities, most often not engaging the Association's shield in election campaigns, but due to their successes in the arena of social work, personal popularity and with the support of the organization they often win elections and serve to the society as presidents, city mayors, village heads, council members or boards and self-government institutions.

Catholic Action itself engages actively in works for their local communities: create charity groups of "Caritas", club-rooms for children and youth, summer vacations for children of poor families, also from the East, organizes Social Weeks and many other events.

In Częstochowa environment, the best known to me from its nature, many examples of Catholic Action's cooperation with self-government can be quoted.

Catholic Action of Czestochowa Archdiocese has been existing since 1996. It is an active partner of Częstochowa city within the range of social aid for indigent persons, prevention and alcoholism problems' solving and a participant in culture.

Activities on behalf of children and youth

The Association fulfills its tasks by combating malnutrition among children at schools, arranging local club-rooms for children and youth, organizing feasts, sports tournaments,

competitions for teenagers, various meetings, e.g. Christmas with Santa Claus and gifts for children.

Catholic Action for 14 years has been arranging summer and winter vacations for poor and pathological families' children and youth. Hundreds of participants from Częstochowa and the region have benefited by this support. The work is based on social activity of the Action members and a number of volunteers. The role of priests-assistants, who take care of numerous branches of Catholic Action in our Archdiocese and participate in its development is invaluable.

Center of Social Integration

Catholic Action also directs its help to the unemployed supervising the Center of Social Integration in Częstochowa, at 21 Legionów st. The legal base of CSJ's functioning is the Act on Social Employment from June 13th 2008. Częstochowa CSJ started its work in March 2007. Its beginning was the Club of Mutual Help acting between 2005 – 2006. Next the Action continued activities within the project "Together for success" financed from European Social Fund (2006-2007). At the same time CSJ financed in 2007 and 2008 from Częstochowa City budget appears. It implements individual program of social employment, within which participants have obligation to take part for 6h daily in professional workshops and psychological classes program (individual and group). They obtain one meal a day, integration benefit and commuting costs refund.

The Center underwent varied history. Last year at ceremonious meeting of Częstochowa non-governmental organizations the President Anna Kwiatkowska presented the results which said that the program of social employment in CSJ was completed by 38 participants. Directly after graduating, 14 persons undertook contract jobs. The problem of this type of activity is lack of financial liquidity. Action tries, despite difficulties, to raise financial means to keep the Center working.

Help for the most needing

Catholic Action of Częstochowa Archdiocese is a partner of Food Bank in Częstochowa in fulfilling European Union Food Aid for Deprived Persons PEAD. This program has been working in EU countries since 1987. The background of its activity is Regulation of European Commission No 3730/87, enabling unpaid donations of food obtained from reserves of EU to the deprived by accredited charity organizations from the area of the Union countries. The idea of the program was born in the 80's, when warehouses of intervention agencies of the Union countries stored large quantities of surplus food. Union authorities were not able either to sell them within the Union or export out of the member countries, due to, among others, high costs of export surcharge. Simultaneously storing surplus food required higher and higher costs. In this situation it was regarded as arguable to commit the stored stocks among poor people of member countries.

Starting with 2004, Poland as EU member has been able in full to participate in European mechanism delivering food for the poorest citizens. According to the rules defined by EU entrepreneurs selected by tender deliver to warehouses of accredited charity organizations ready food products, in return for goods' release by EU.

Food Bank in Częstochowa within PEAD Program delivers to these people nearly 2000t of products a year. About 40 000 persons benefit from this aid in all Częstochowa region. The food reaches people in need by non-governmental organizations. Parish circles of CA are perfect partners of Food Bank, because they reach with help numerous families and the poorest inhabitants of Częstochowa.

The latest examples

Two months ago a new project of resolution doubling the number of units trading with high percentage alcohol was put to proceeding of the City Council. Councillors of Self-government Community Club organized together with Archdiocesan CA common operation of collecting signatures of protest. During two Sundays over 7 thousand signatures of Czestochowa inhabitants were collected. Last month the problem of traffic organization and modernization of central Czestochowa place (Biegański Square) was to be settled. One of suggestions was to cut down trees circling St. Jacob church, what would disrupt ancient sacral space of the place. This plan met radical protest of parish CA, which caused withdrawing from the harmful project.

Catholic Action is today one of the most important social organizations acting close to people and for people. It is also significant partner of self-government authorities in fulfilling statutory duties towards the dwellers.

To complete my speech I would like to express my thanks to CA members for their perfect service to people, particularly the ones in need.

Thank You for inviting me to such an important conference.