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OPUS AID “AD GENTES” IN SERVICE OF THE MISSIONS

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council preached that Church is missionary by her very nature and all the baptized are endowed with the missionary vocation¹. In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples². Their task is to pray for the missions and missionary vocations, to help missionaries and to follow their work with interest³.

Pope John Paul II called attention to the topicality of the missions in the modern world and to the necessity of securing them financially and materially. He wrote: “The material and financial needs of the missions are many: not only to set up the Church with minimal structures (chapels, schools for catechists and seminarians, housing), but also to support works of charity, education and human promotion – a vast field of action especially in poor countries. The missionary Church gives what she receives, and distributes to the poor the material goods that her materially richer sons and daughters generously put at her disposal. Here I wish to thank all those who make sacrifices and contribute to the work of the missions. Their sacrifices and sharing are indispensable for building up the Church and for showing love”⁴.

10 years ago Polish bishops established Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” which helps missionaries in organised, planned and constant way. In this article we present a short history of its establishment, the forms of animation and formation used by the Opus and the range of help which it offers to the missionaries.

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¹ Zob. *Ad gentes*, 2.

² Zob. *Evangelii gaudium*, 120.

³ Zob. *Redemptoris missio*, 77.

⁴ Zob. tamże, 81.

Establishment and development of the Opus

The first attempts to create an organization which would help financially and materially missionaries were already made by Archbishop Wojciech Ziemba in 2000⁵. Eventually, the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” was established at the request of the chairman of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions Bishop Wiktor Skworc. During the 333rd Plenary Session of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate on 22-24 September 2005, Polish bishops endorsed the establishment of the Opus. In the “Communiqué” the bishops reminded the faithful that “the works of mercy in the domain of corporeality and spirituality are the important sign of faith. May upcoming Week of Mercy and Week of Missions become a chance for helping the needy and supporting generously missionary activities of the Church”⁶.

The direct impulse to establish the Opus was given by Pope Benedict XVI⁷. On the meeting with the second group of bishops who came to Rome with an *ad limina* visit, the Pope said: „I thank God because he continues to lavish upon Poland the grace of numerous vocations. The Southern Region, which you represent, dear Brothers, is particularly rich in vocations. Considering the enormous needs on the part of the universal Church, I ask you to encourage your priests to do their missionary service or pastoral work in countries where clergy are scarce. It seems that today this is a special task and, in a certain sense, also a duty of the Church in Poland. In the sending of priests abroad, however, especially to the missions, remember to assure them both of your spiritual support and adequate material resources”⁸.

The missionary diocese of Bishop Jan Ozga’s request for financial help had also its impact on the establishment of the Opus. Bishop Ozga found the diocese of Doumé indebted and in financial ruin. He needed money to redeem the debts of Catholic schools and to maintain health centres and pharmacies at the missionary outposts. Therefore there was an urgent need to organise a nationwide collection which was carried out on the Second Sunday of Lent. The money was passed to Bishop Jan Ozga and it was decided that the help for missions will be continued in the following years.

Archbishop Józef Michalik, president of the Polish Episcopal Conference, erected the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” by decree of 3 October 2005. The Opus has legal personality given by the ordinance of Minister of the Interior and Administration of 24 March 2006, according to the act on the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland.

⁵ Zob. J. Mazur, *Radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapału*, Kielce 2015, 217.

⁶ *Komunikat z 333. Zebrania Plenarnego KEP*, 24 IX 2005 r., za: http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/333_komunikat_24092005.html, (dostęp: 8.06.2016).

⁷ Zob. Z. Sobolewski, *Pomóż polskim misjonarzom*, Warszawa 2014, s. 6.

⁸ *Słowo Ojca Świętego Benedykta XVI do biskupów polskich*, 2, Rzym 3 II 2005 r., za: <http://opusdei.pl/pl-pl/article/benedykt-xvi-do-biskupow-polskich-podczas-wizyty-ad-limina-apostolorum/>, (dostęp: 8.06.2016).

The name of the Opus refers to the Decree on the mission activity of the Church "Ad gentes divinitus" of the Second Vatican Council. In this Decree the Council Fathers emphasised the missionary nature of the Church and the common missionary vocation of all the baptized⁹. They also called attention to the topicality of the missions *ad gentes* despite the cultural and religious changes occurring rapidly in the modern world. This thought was often repeated by the bishops of Rome encouraging the whole Church to zealously involve in missionary works¹⁰.

Fr. Marcin Iżycki, a priest from the Diocese of Warszawa-Praga, became an organiser and the first director of the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes". He served as a director from 1 June 2006 to 12 May 2008. The Opus has found its seat in the Missionary Formation Centre (Centrum Formacji Misyjnej) at 1 Byszewska St., which prepares candidates for missions. The office was located in the room on the ground floor of the detached building; the director moved into the second floor. Apart from director, an assistance and an accountant were employed.

The second director of the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" was fr. Marek Gałuszka, a priest from the Diocese of Świdnica (1 July 2008-30 June 2010). Having finished work in the Opus, fr. Gałuszka got involved in the works of The Society of African Missions and went for the missions to Tanzania. He dwelled in Kilulu and Mosohono until 2013.

The next director of the Opus was fr. Zenon Zajęc, a Fidei Donum priest, a former missionary in Cameroon and Martinique. He was connected with the Missionary Formation Centre from 2009 and was responsible for the work of the Opus from 30 June 2010 to 23 August 2011. He was briefly succeeded by fr. Janusz Paciorek, a priest from the Diocese of Tarnów; a spiritual father and later a director of the Missionary Formation Centre in Warsaw and a consultant of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions.

On 1 November 2011, the director of the Opus was fr. Jarosław Buchowiecki, from the Diocese of Ełk. He served in this capacity until 31 June 2013.

At present, the duties of the director of the Opus Aid are performed by Fr. Prelate Zbigniew Sobolewski, a priest from the Diocese of Siedlce, a consultant of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions. In years 2014-2015 he was supported by an economic director fr. Andrzej Sochal.

Objectives and statutory duties of the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes"

The first Statute of the Opus was ratified on the 333rd Plenary Session of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate, which took place in Wrocław, on 22-24 September 2005. The statute enacted *ad experimentum* for 3 years set main

⁹ *Ad gentes*, 2.

¹⁰ Zob. *Redemptoris missio*, 11; *Evangelii gaudium*, 24. Szerzej na ten temat: J. Mazur, *Radość Ewangelii...*, dz. cyt., 106n.

objectives as follows: 1) supporting Polish missionaries of the Catholic Church in the realization of their mission; 2) supporting charity, social and cultural work in the missionary territory, especially the one run by Polish missionaries; 3) gathering and disseminating information about Polish missionaries' work; 4) missionary animation in Poland¹¹.

During 345th Plenary Session of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate, which took place in Białystok on 26-28 September 2008, the Statute of the Opus was ratified for an indefinite period. The last amend of the Statute was introduced on 349th Plenary Session of the Conference of the Polish Episcopate, which took place in Warsaw on 6-7 October 2009. In the amended Statute a provision was added with a new objective of the Opus which is "supporting activities for the development – especially work in the area of education, healthcare, services for reduction of poverty and social and cultural activities in the territory of missions held by Polish missionaries"¹². This provision was added to enable gaining subventions from the ministry of Foreign Affairs for the help in development for the poorest countries and to transform the Opus into a public benefit organization.

According to the Statute, the Opus perform its duties by: "1) providing direct financial, material and organisational help in building churches, chapels and other places of worship in missionary dioceses; 2) providing direct financial, material and organisational help for evangelization; 3) providing direct charitable help, especially financial and material, for people, societies, charity and caring or educational and pedagogical institutions working in the missionary territory; 4) providing direct financial, material and organisational help for education of missionaries; 5) participating in the costs of medical treatment and leisure of missionaries; 6) organising of meetings and conferences disseminating information about missionary activities of the Church; 7) collecting funds and goods for fulfilling the objectives of the Opus; 8) collaborating with other legal and natural persons within the borders of the country or abroad interested in fulfilling the objectives of the Opus"¹³.

Missionary animation of the Opus

The Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" from the beginning of its existence is involved in missionary animation in Poland. Every year it prepares liturgical and homiletic materials which helps experience missionary spirit of the Second Sunday of Lent, when in every church in Poland there is a collection for missionary work. The Opus sends to every parish in Poland a poster and a Communiqué of president of the Commission for Missions concerning the very Day of Prayer, Fasting and Solidarity for Missionaries. It puts also the propositions of the

¹¹ *Statut Działa Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, mps, Archiwum PDAG.

¹² *Statut Działa Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, art. 6 par. 5, mps, Archiwum DPAG.

¹³ *Statut Działa Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, 6-7 X 2009 r., mps, Archiwum DPAG.

homily and the General Intercessions for the Second Sunday of Lent in the bulletin published by the Pontifical Mission Societies which contains liturgical materials for the whole year.

The Opus is involved in promoting the idea of missions, it presents the work of Polish missionaries and encourages to pray for new missionary vocations by collaborating with Catholic and public media. During the year, the director of the Opus or his co-workers pass the information about important missionary events in Poland and abroad to Polish broadcasting corporations Polskie Radio and TVP. The Opus collaborates with Catholic redactions of Polskie Radio and TVP by participating in broadcasts. It promotes subjects of missions in Catholic broadcasters and press: Radio Maryja, Radio Warszawa, Radio Podlasie, Telewizji "Trwam" and "Nasz Dziennik", "Niedziela", "Gość Niedzielny", "Idziemy", "Katolickie Echo Podlasia", "List do chorych" and "List do Pani". Reports from missionary events prepared by the Opus and interviews with missionaries are often published on web portals. The missionary issues are often raised by journalists from: deon.pl, podlasie24.pl, opoka.info.pl, ekai.pl, gosc.pl, katolik.pl, misje.pl.

On Epiphany, the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" together with the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions publish a newspaper "Pomagajmy misjom" ("Let's help missions"). It has circulation of 250 000 copies and is distributed in 400 cities, towns and villages by Orszak Trzech Króli (an organisation preparing Cavalcades of Magi across the country). The newspaper presents Polish missionary works and popularizes the knowledge about missions.

During the year, the representatives of the Opus visit parish communities to talk about missions. This form of the popularisation of missionary idea has developed, especially in recent years, thanks to the kindness of parish priests from some dioceses. The meetings with the faithful let us talk about missions, collect offerings for support for the particular works, promote missionary press and ask for the prayer for missions. In recent years, the directors of the Opus visited over a dozen of parishes, promoting special prayer book for Divine Mercy as a donation for missions. Missionary rosaries, booklets and missionary pictures were also distributed. The Opus "Ad Gentes" is also supported in popularisation of missions by the students from the Missionary Formation Centre who distribute missionary pictures, booklets, albums and book prayers in their parishes. Thanks to this actions, the more and more people familiarize themselves with activities of Polish missionaries and join the circle of donors for the Opus.

Particularly active time for the missionary animation was in the years of preparation for 4th Polish Congress of Missionaries in Warsaw. The directors of the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" got involved in the preparations of the Congress and became members of the office and logistic commissions organising the Congress. Fr. Zbigniew Sobolewski was a secretary of the Congress and a member of a commission preparing youth station on the Congress; fr. Andrzej Sochal

was responsible for media support and logistics (preparation of spots, alimentation, obtaining all necessary permissions, etc.).

The Opus Aid prepared few publications for The Congress which helped with popularisation of the Opus. In 2014, the texts of formation conferences and scripts of catechesis for all types of schools and for adults were published and then passed to every parish in Poland to make it accessible for the catechists¹⁴. The scripts of catechesis were available on the website of the catechetical institute on The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and on the website of the Opus. Teachers of Religious Education had an opportunity to make use of this materials.

The Opus also contributed to the publication of an album edited by Bishop Jerzy Mazur SVD which presents theology and praxis of missions¹⁵. The publication presents derivation of the missions from the Holy Trinity, the history of the missions and achievements of Polish missionaries, especially from the last fifty years. The album contains also the presentation of works of the Missionary Formation Centre, the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” and MIVA Poland.

In the year of the Congress, the Opus published liturgical and homiletic materials¹⁶ and the Congress guidebook used by the participants of the Congress meetings in Warsaw¹⁷. The Opus contributed to preparation of an exhibition presenting missionary achievements of religious congregations and the work of organisations supporting missions in Poland. The exhibition was showed on the Congress and in some Warsaw churches in the period before the event. After the Congress, the exhibition was passed to the parishes which were willing to display it.

After the Congress, the Opus Aid prepared a broad scientific publication containing the congress materials. In the book there was a broad report from the preparations of the congress – on central level, but also in the dioceses and religious congregations – and the texts of speeches, homilies, scientific lectures and interviews. The book was distributed to everyone involved in the missionary works of the Church in Poland.

Contact with missionaries and donors

The Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” was established to serve missionaries in spiritual and material way. Thus its priority is to be in contact with missionaries. Every year the office of the Opus is visited by the missionaries – who come to Poland for their holidays – themselves or by the missionary rapporteurs of the

¹⁴ IV Krajowy Kongres Misyjny, *Radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapachu. Konferencje dla poszczególnych grup wiernych. Scenariusze katechez dla dzieci, młodzieży i dorosłych*, Warszawa 2014.

¹⁵ Por. J. Mazur, *Radość Ewangelii...*, dz. cyt.

¹⁶ IV Krajowy Kongres Misyjny, *Radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapachu. Materiały liturgiczno-homiletyczne 12-14 czerwca 2015 r.*, Warszawa 2015.

¹⁷ Dzieło Pomocy „Ad Gentes”, *Radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapachu*, Warszawa 2015.

religious congregations and bishops' delegates for missions in the dioceses. The contacts with missionaries increase during the holidays when many of them come to Poland to rest. The missionaries are supported financially by the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" for the time of their holidays and have a possibility to spend a week in Missionary Formation House in Jastrzębia Góra.

The employees of the Opus hold interviews with missionaries, which are later used in popularising missionary subjects in media. Many of them were published on the site www.adgentes.misje.pl as illustrations of missionary works.

One of the forms of being in contact with the missionaries and identifying their real needs are ministry visits made every year by president of the Commission for Missions, secretary of the Commission and director of the Opus to one chosen missionary country. The visits are preceded by the invitations of the missionaries. In recent years the visits took place in missionary outposts in Zambia, Cameroon, Peru and Ecuador. The visits give great possibility to experience in better way missionary reality; they are also an opportunity for missionaries to speak and get to know possibilities of obtaining help.

An important role in being in contact with missionaries plays the website of the Opus¹⁸. It presents missionary events in Poland and in missionary countries and the profiles of missionaries and their assistants. Also the letters from the missionaries, the requests for financial help and information about finishing missionary projects are published there.

The website is very popular. It is visited especially in months during which important missionary events are held. One can find there interesting photos and films from missions. Apart from the website, the Opus has also a Facebook page. The materials prepared by the employees of the Opus are also used by other web portals.

Within a decade of existence the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" developed its own forms of searching for people who would help financially the missionaries. The Opus informs extensively about the needs, collected sums and the way of using them both in the Catholic press and on its own websites.

The Opus reaches the donors by distributing pamphlets and booklets about the works under execution. It looks for the sponsors and donors mostly among the faithful of the Church in Poland and it is to them when the Opus directs an appeal for financial help and generosity for missionary works during the Second Sunday of Lent and on other occasions. The directors of the Opus willingly responses for the invitations of parish priests to visit their communities during the liturgical year. They take part in picnics organised to collect funds for missions. The Opus promotes among the faithful SMS donations as an all-year form of help.

¹⁸ www.adgentes.misje.pl

On the occasion of Christmas and Easter, the director of the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” sends greetings and information to all the donors in Poland. They receive pictures and folders which says about current works.

Missionary contest

One of the valuable initiatives held by the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes” since 2008 is a contest “My schoolmate from missions”. At the begging its name was “My schoolmate from Africa”. The contest were organised by the Commission for Missions and the Pontifical Mission Societies. At the request of Bishop Wiktor Skworc, the contest is organised by the Opus. The organisers invite to participate in the contest the students from primary and secondary schools. Also the teachers and catechists can participate in it by presenting lesson scripts about missions.

Within the years, the contest had a patronage of Apostolic nuncio in Poland, minister of National Education and president of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions.

Every year a considerable amount of schools named after card. Stefan Wyszyński, John Paul II and fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Catholic schools and school Caritas clubs participate in the contest. From few years the number of schools participating in the contest holds the level of 480-450 establishments and 4800-5000 participants. Thus the contest arouse unfading interest.

The contest is held in two stages: in school and nationwide. In every school there is a commission which evaluates works in categories: literary, art, music, charity work and lesson script (for teachers). The commissions send winning works to the Opus Aid “Ad Gentes”, where the final decisions are made.

The contest’s organisers are pleased not only with students’ and teachers’ unfading interest in it, but most of all – with the high level of works. The topics mentioned in essays, interviews, poems and other literary works shows high sensitivity of children and the youth and their knowledge of conditions of living of their peers in missionary countries. The students see the need of bringing help to them and take action – within the category of charity works – in form of interesting initiatives aiming to collect funds for the implementation of one chosen missionary project¹⁹. The money was passed for a particular missionary project for a first time in 2009. In 2010 children collected money for building a shelter for children from streets of Oruro in Bolivia and the help for children in Uganda²⁰. During 9th edition of the contest the children supported building of a boarding school for poor girls in Nguemendouka (Cameroon). In recent

¹⁹ W 2009 r. w ramach konkursu dzieci zbierały pieniądze na remont szkoły w Papui Nowej Gwinei oraz na pomoc dzieciom Pakistanie. Zob. Informacje z działalności Dzieła Pomocy „Ad Gentes” w 2009 r., 080/AG/PW/2010, Archiwum DPAG.

²⁰ Zob. *Komunikat Dzieła Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, Warszawa 23 IX 2010, mps, Archiwum DPAG.

years (2013-2015), thanks to the invention and involvement of the contests participants the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" passed money for building a kindergarten held by Salvatorian sisters in Kolwezi (the Democratic Republic of the Congo). According to sr. Estera Wawro, a director of the kindergarten, thanks to the help of Polish children new classrooms were build, furnished and equipped with toys and teaching aids.

The contest launched creative potential in children and youth. Many interesting initiatives were created in schools and parishes: very valuable lesson scripts, not only about missions and missionaries, but also about tolerance, respect for rights of the others; really universal lessons which teach how to break down stereotypes, fight off prejudices, increase curiosity and openness to the world.

In many schools there were organised different contests, exhibitions, spectacles, people prepared food and even fashion shows and dancing shows. The contest encouraged whole school and local communities to get involved in the initiatives that brought great pedagogical effects. It enabled showing the richness of the works of Polish missionaries – the ambassadors of our country all over the world – it helped in understanding people among whom they live, with all their cultural achievements and tradition and it integrated young people around the idea of education in the spirit of respect for the others, regardless of their place of living or skin colour. Thanks to the Contest everybody learns openness to other nations and cultures and develops their own sensitivity.

Aid projects

The Opus Aid „Ad Gentes” gives grants for projects which can be applied twice a year – for autumn (October) and spring (April) sessions.

The Opus provides the grants up to 2 000 Euro for four types of activities: evangelization, medical, educational and charitable.

The evangelization works are connected with directly religious activity of missionary outposts²¹. The missionaries obtain financial help which serves for building or renovation of churches, chapels, parsonages and chaplaincy houses. The projects concerning the purchase of liturgical equipment, the Holy Scripture and church songbooks were implemented. Many projects concern the religious and moral formation of the catechists. The Opus provides grants for trainings for them and the purchase of didactic materials and books. In recent years many missionaries made requests for grants for retreats away from their place of living, evangelization camps or some forms of organised recreation for children and youth which serve for integration of the young generation with the parish.

²¹ „Projekty ewangelizacyjne stanowią najliczniejszą grupę wśród zgłaszanych przez misjonarzy próśb o pomoc finansową”. Z. Sobolewski, *Pomóż polskim...*, dz. cyt., s. 7.

Medical projects, coming especially from many African countries, concern in the first place enabling the purchase of essential medicines for AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and infectious diseases, bandages and dressings, minor medical and laboratory equipment. The Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" helps sisters with maintenance of missionary clinics and pharmacies where poor ill people can get free medicines and food. The Opus uses money destined for medical projects supporting renovations of clinics and hospitals and providing grants for feeding the ill. The money coming from Poland goes also for health prevention, especially education about avoiding infectious disease which decimate the population of children.

A considerable amount of projects applied each year by the missionaries constitute charitable projects related to the help for the poorest²² The Opus commits funds for building, maintenance and running rest homes and orphanages; the fight against undernourishment and the hunger and against effects of unemployment; the help for refugees and the victims of intrastate conflicts and natural disasters. The Opus pay particular attention to help for children in Africa who are the victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters. A great part of the funds goes for the treatment of children infected with HIV.

The last, but as important as the previous ones, group of aid projects constitute educational projects. They are related to the popularisation of access to education. The Opus provides grants for building and running schools and kindergartens; purchasing teaching aids, manuals and school supplies; paying fees for the teachers and covering costs of school charges for students. The Opus implements the projects which consist of the purchase of computers and manuals for schools, school supplies and teaching aids. It supports also the work of the shelters for children, dormitories for the needy youth and help centres for street children and the victims of domestic violence. It provides help, especially for girls, with finding an occupation and earning funds for living.

The Opus allocated the most of its funds for humanitarian aid and missionary outposts in the countries such as : Argentina, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, the Congo Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, El Salvador, Sierra

²² „Bardzo często misjonarze i misjonarki są jedynymi, którzy prowadzą walkę z głodem i niedożywieniem, nędzą materialną i duchową oraz upominają się o poszanowanie godności najsłabszych grup społecznych: sierot, samotnych starców, niepełnosprawnych, uchodźców, bezrobotnych i bezdomnych, matek samotnie wychowujących dzieci, chorych na AIDS. Trudno wyobrazić sobie kraje Afryki i Azji, Ameryki Południowej i Środkowej bez działalności charytatywnej misji. Mimo, że misjonarze nie mogą pomóc wszystkim i usunąć wszystkich skutków niesprawiedliwego podziału dóbr, niestrudzenie walczą z wykluczeniem społecznym z jej powodu”. Tamże, s. 15.

Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In years 2006-2015 the Opus implemented 1 528 projects for a total sum of 6 591 690 PLN.

In the first year of its existence, the Opus provided funding for 118 projects for a total sum of 179 000 USD. The taken actions consisted of projects such as: financing feeding the children in Doumé (Cameroon), providing equipment for an educational and recreational room in Bulu Bulu (Bolivia), the help in the purchase of the house for nine orphans in Kigali (Rwanda), building of catechetical rooms in Reserva do Iguaçu (Brazil) and building water installation for the mission in Makunka (Zambia).

In the next year, the Opus provided funding for 101 projects for a sum of 145 000 USD. It was, among others, the projects concerning: the education of girls and the regulation of their documents (Aiquile, Bolivia); feeding orphans and providing medicines, school supplies and school charges for them (Lusaka, Zambia); building a kindergarten and a meeting room in Kimberley (South Africa). In that year the financial help was provided for the building of the Educational, Cultural and Social Centre in Guatemala and the pastoral and catechetical project in Huncayu (Peru) has been started.

Year 2008 came with the implementation of 157 projects for a sum of 225 440 USD. Among the implemented projects were: building 5 water tanks for the poorest families in the mission in Bom Jesus de Lapa (Brazil); financing new altar and ambo for a church in Taldykorgan (Kazakhstan); building new Clinic of The Holy Spirit in Maggoty (Jamiaca); medical help for Health Centre in Bumba (the Democratic Republic of the Congo); renovation of wiring in parish house (Tanlajas, Mexico).

In the following year the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" allocated 208 700 Euro and 6 000 USD for implementation of 124 projects. The projects financed by the Opus's funds were among others: the purchase of a central heating stove for a parish house (Astana, Kazakhstan); providing food for children and the purchase of educational aids for a clubhouse for children (Oruro, Bolivia); support for works of the Apostolate of Divine Mercy (Atok, Cameroon); building of a chapel (Chikawi, Zambia); rebuilding of habitations damaged by a cyclone and organisation of an equipped kinesiotherapy hall (Morondava, Madagascar).

In 2010 the Opus Aid allocated funds of a total sum of 180 000 Euro for implementation of 167 aid projects. The projects concerned activities such as: renovation of hermitage and organisation of the communication and first aid systems (Assekrem, Algeria); providing equipment for the library and books for students (Parakou, Benin); help in renovation of the roof of the church and roofs of the parish buildings in the parish of La Assunta (Santa Cruze, Bolivia); providing food for the poor children (Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic) and professional preparation courses for the refugees from Sudan (Alexandria, Egypt).

In the following year 174 projects were implemented for a total sum of 180 000 Euro. It was the projects such as: the purchase of materials necessary for ministry meetings (Tizi, Algeria); formation for the teachers (Cochabamba, Bolivia); providing equipment for club house for street children and providing food (Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo); help in the purchase of medicines and food for 300 children with AIDS.

In 2012 the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" allocated 132 400 Euro to finance 134 projects. This support helped, among the others, with building a chapel in Beroroha (Madagascar); buying a multimedia projector for missionary outpost in Mtwara (Tanzania) and food for the orphans from Health Centre in Gikongo (Rwanda); financing the change of wiring and roof lining in the parish house in San Antonio (Portoviejo, Equador) and providing funding for catechists' and teachers' formation and buying teaching aids for them (Bertoua, Cameroon).

The year 2013 passed with a record number of implemented projects and funds allocated to them. The Opus financed then 198 projects for a total sum of 217 000 Euro. Among these projects there were: the adaptation of a residential building for the needs of sisters congregation (Antananarivo, Madagascar); the medical treatment for the employees of the mission in Bertoua (Cameroon); the purchase of food and medicines for the prisoners (Toamasina, Madagascar); the purchase of medicines for the Health Center in Ngozi (Burundi) and the help for children and youth in Yaoundé (Cameroon). In that year it was decided that even the grants smaller than 2000 Euro would be given to all the missionaries applying for help.

In the following year the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" allocated 160 000 Euro to 160 projects. They concerned works such as: renovation and painting of a chancel in the parish church in Ciochabamba (Bolivia); providing food for children from poor families who participate in club house activities in Karaganda (Kazakhstan); extension and adaptation of a maternity unit and two hospital buildings (Dubie, the Democratic Republic of the Congo); financing a kitchen in Educational and Therapeutic Centre for children in San Ramon (Bolivia) and religious education for the youth in the mission in Kabwe (Zambia).

In 2015 requests for financing 175 missionary projects were applied. The Opus allocated to their implementation 150 000 Euro. In that year we managed to make the renovation of the parish house in Zamora (Ecuador); buy milk, medicines and special nourishment for the ill in the mission in Ayos (Cameroon); finance the running of the formation centre in Aktobe (Kazakhstan); purchase paint and renovate buildings in the mission in Nguemendouka (Cameroon) and buy the seeds for the poorest families affected by the drought in Ngozi (Burundi).

Thanks to the funds obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2007 the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" implemented in 9 African countries the aid project "Education in Sub-Saharan Africa" by the sum of 326 491 PLN. Within the

scope of the project a boarding school for children from the bush in Madagascar was equipped with manuals, exercise books, teaching aids, and necessary supplies for a clubhouse and a library. In South Africa a computer course for 100 children was organised, the wicker and other materials for making baskets by the blind were bought and the school was equipped with teaching and technical aids. In Togo books for the school library and two computers were bought. In Central African Republic video and sound equipment for the work with the youth were bought. In Rwanda educational aids for schools were bought, in Kenya – teaching aids and RTV equipment and in Chad – books, magazines and dictionaries. In Cameroon, thanks to the project, musical instruments, RTV equipment and sewing tools were obtained; in Uganda the missionary outposts received sewing machines, sewing tools, threads, zip fasteners and buttons²³.

At present the Opus Aid "Ad Gentes" has signed a contract with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the implementation of the project "Improving access to education for children in the region of Dar es Salaam, through the development of the Educational Centre of St. Maximilian Kolbe, Segerea (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)"²⁴. The project consist of finishing a new building of a primary school which is presently incomplete and providing equipment for it. The building is to serve for 800 students. It will have 18 classrooms providing good conditions for learning. Next to the school there will be a sport field and toilets. One of the forms of support for the missionaries provided by the Opus Aid „Ad Gentes” are annual grants given to the Fidei Donum priests and secular missionaries. Since 2008 the Opus has also financed holiday grants for all the missionaries.

In 2008 a sum of 819 514.84 PLN was allocated to annual grants for the missionaries and a sum of 263 024 PLN²⁵ – for the holiday grants. In 2009 the grants for the missionaries costed 980 000 PLN and the refund of the insurance for the secular missionaries costed 100 000 PLN. In the following year the sum of grants given to diocesan priests and secular missionaries was 1 031 000 PLN²⁶. In 2011 the total sum of annual grants awarded to diocesan priests and secular missionaries was 955 500 PLN²⁷ and in the following year this sum was 987 000 PLN²⁸. In 2013 a sum of 829 500 PLN²⁹ was allocated to the annual

²³ *Wniosek o dofinansowanie projektu „Education In Subsahara's Africa”, mps, Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁴ *Oferta o dofinansowanie projektu „Improving access to education for children in the region of Dar es Salaam, through the development of the Educational Centre of St. Maximilian Kolbe, Segerea (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania), mps. Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁵ *Zob. Sprawozdanie z działalności Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes” od 1.01.2008 do 31.12.2008 r., mps., Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁶ *Zob. Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”, mps. Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁷ *Zob. Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”, 348/AG/PW/2011, mps, Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁸ *Zob. Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”, 136/AG/PW/2012, mps. Archiwum DPAG.*

²⁹ *Zob. Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”, 130/AG/PW/2013, mps. Archiwum DPAG.*

grants of diocesan priests and missionaries. In 2014 the Opus awarded the diocesan priests and the missionaries with the grants of a sum of 966 000 PLN³⁰ and in the following year – of a sum of 1 025 500 PLN³¹.

SMS donations: text „MISJE”

From 1 January 2009 the Opus Aid „Ad Gentes” collects fund for the missions by the SMS donation. Thanks to the kindness of all the mobile phone network operators in Poland (Orange, T-Mobile, Plus, Play) which operate this number charitably, there is such opportunity to collect money for the implementation of humanitarian and charitable projects in the missions. It turned out that it is an effective and simple method of collecting the funds which gains in popularity. Year by year, thanks to the information campaigns, the number of people supporting the missions by SMS is increasing.

In years 2009-2015 the Opus Aid „Ad Gentes” obtained the funds in a sum of 1 366 465.59 PLN, which were allocated to the implementation of 115 projects.

In 2016 six projects were chosen. They are: medical help for the ethnic community in Yuracare in Bolivia, providing food for the children in the diocese of Oruro in Bolivia, building a drilled well for a mission in Bayanga (Central African Republic), professional preparation for girls in Burhinyi-Mulambi (the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the project „The school is my only future” which consist of rebuilding of the St. Kizito school complex in Bangui (Central African Republic) and running the St. Rita house club in Iquitos (Peru). The funds collected in this way are passed to the missionaries twice a year. Thanks to that, the Opus assures fulfilling its objectives.

Conclusion

The Opus Aid „Ad Gentes” is an organisation which made its impact on the Polish missionary society. Numerous initiatives for the missions made it recognisable and trustworthy for the faithful who supports the missions by its means. The Opus, being a branch of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Missions, collaborates willingly with another organisations, associations, foundations and church movements which bring material and spiritual help for missions. The Opus is an important partner for the missionaries in their evangelization, charitable, educational and medical service.

Key words: Polish help for missions, educational works, charitable works, evangelization works, the help of the Church of Poland, missionary outposts, missionaries.

³⁰ Zob. *Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, 155/AG/WP/2014, mps, Archiwum DPAG.

³¹ Zob. *Komunikat Dzielu Pomocy „Ad Gentes”*, 015/AG/PW/2015, mps, Archiwum DPAG.