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The Pastoral Model of Educating Seniors at Universities of the Third Age at UPJPII in Krakow

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Abstract

The Pastoral Model of Educating Seniors at U3A UPJPII in Krakow

Universities of the third age have become very popular in Poland and in the world. As institutions dealing with lifelong learning, they have the appropriate competencies to ensure that the various needs of seniors are met. U3A, established at UPJPII in Kraków in 2011, is one of such programs, dynamically operating in Poland. It is aimed not only at increasing the level of general knowledge but also at the religious formation of the students. The university has a religious profile and implements a pastoral and educational program, that includes lectures and workshops in the field of the Bible and anthropology, ethics, theology, philosophy and history of the Church, as well as an educational and cultural program (religious tourism, theatre arts), that is meant as a form of creative support for seniors. Plenary lectures and seminar workshops are complemented with the offer of additional educational and developmental classes. They include foreign language learning, computer courses, tourism, sports and cultural activities. Thanks to our U3A, many elderly people have improved their self-esteem and sense of dignity. They have also learned how to overcome problems related to old age and barriers preventing them from full participation in social and parish life.

Keywords: universities of the third age, pastoral model of educating, religious formation, forms of activity

Abstrakt

Duszpasterski model kształcenia seniorów na UTW UPJPII w Krakowie

Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku cieszą się w Polsce i na świecie dużą popularnością. Jako instytucje zajmujące się ustawicznym kształceniem mają odpowiednie kompetencje, aby zapewnić realizację różnych potrzeb seniorów. Do dynamicznie działających w Polsce takich jednostek zalicza się założony w roku 2011 Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku należący do Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie. Zabiega on nie tylko o wzrost poziomu wiedzy ogólnej, ale i formację religijną słuchaczy. Uniwersytet posiada profil religijny i realizuje duszpastersko-edukacyjny program, w którego skład wchodzi wykłady i warsztaty z zakresu Biblii i antropologii, etyki, teologii, filozofii i historii Kościoła, oraz edukacyjno-kulturalny (turystyka religijna, sztuka teatralna). Stanowi on formę twórczego wsparcia dla seniorów. Wykłady plenarne i warsztaty o charakterze seminaryjnym uzupełniają ofertę zajęć dodatkowych. Są to zajęcia edukacyjno-rozwojowe. Obejmuje w swym zakresie naukę języków obcych, kursy komputerowe, turystykę, zajęcia sportowe i kulturalne. Dzięki UTW wiele osób w podeszłym wieku poprawiło swoją samoocenę i poczucie wartości. Naucz-

ły się też pokonywać problemy związane ze starością oraz bariery przeszkadzające w pełnym uczestnictwie w życiu społecznym i parafialnym.

Słowa kluczowe: Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku, pastoralny model kształcenia, formacja religijna, formy aktywności

Universities of the Third Age are internationally recognised institutions offering the possibility to continue long-life education to elderly people. By encouraging them to activity, these organizations help the elderly adapt to the changes that are taking place in the contemporary world.

Universities of the Third Age have become very popular worldwide, including in Poland. The University of the Third Age operating at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow has a Christian profile and refers to the teaching of the Church. This is clearly visible above all in the lectures, which are mainly focused on theological issues.

In addition to lectures, our U3A provides its students with a wide range of cultural and educational as well as tourist and recreational activities. The implementation of various grant programs extends the educational offer in many other areas, for example areas such as the modern means of communication that enable our participants to continue their comprehensive individual and social development.

In the context above, this article discusses the following issues: (1) Universities of the third age as institutions activating seniors; (2) The teachings of the Church as an inspiration in establishing U3A at UPJPII; (3) The beginnings and development of the U3A UPJPII in Krakow; (4) The theological profile of lectures and workshops; (5) The educational and development classes; (6) Religious formation.

1. Universities of the Third Age as Institutions Activating Seniors

Man develops throughout his life and never reaches his fullness. The senior age is one of the stages of this development and it must be used in a creative way. St. John Paul II is credited with the words that aging is not an evil to which one must submit, but a vocation to which one must be able to respond. In motivating the elderly, Pope Francis, emphasizes

that retirement is not yet the time to “pull the oars on board” “to step aside, abandoning the helm of the boat” but “the time to continue to bear fruit”¹. Therefore, activation of seniors is important because stimulating the individual development of an elderly person, improves the quality of life and deepens its meaning. Because of this activation seniors do not feel socially excluded, but useful, for example through sharing their experience and competences with others².

Universities of the Third Age are institutions that offer older people a way to continue learning throughout their lives. U3A, through its educational activities, helps seniors to accept their age and motivates them to find opportunities to further their integral development. The point is to see old age not so much as a problem, but rather as an opportunity³. These institutions not only help retired people to manage their free time, but also often influence their spiritual development⁴.

The basic goals of each U3A are: education, integration and activation. Through education, it is possible to constantly expand knowledge. Integration activities are to prevent exclusion and help to establish broader interpersonal relationships. Activation is conducive to taking care of the physical and mental condition, which affects the quality of life of seniors⁵.

By participating in classes at U3A, seniors take advantage of the opportunity to pursue their interests and reveal their hidden talents. They expand their knowledge and command of foreign languages or learn to use new inventions of technology and media, for example by learning how to work a computer. In addition, many elderly students

1 Cf. R. Molenda, *Starość jako powołanie*, „Idziemy” 30 (2022), <http://idziemy.pl/spoleczenstwo/starosc-jako-powolanie/74790/1/> (11.01.2022).

2 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Starość to nie obciążenie*, KAI, 21.01.2022, <https://misyjne.pl/ks-prof-jan-dziedzic-starosc-to-nie-obciazenie-rozmowa/> (11.01.2023).

3 J. Dziedzic, *Edukacja seniorów na uniwersytetach trzeciego wieku*, in: *Model kształcenia seniorów na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, ed. J. Dziedzic, Fundacja im. Świętej Królowej Jadwigi dla UPJPII, Kraków 2018, p. 25.

4 Cf. B. Grümme, *Nicht nur Häkeln und Bingo-Spielen. Das Alter als religionspädagogische Herausforderung*, „Polonia Sacra” 19 (2015), p. 33–37.

5 J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, in: *Seniorzy wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce*, red. M. J. Tutak, T. Wielebski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, Warszawa 2019, p. 288.

also become engaged in voluntary work, which gives them a sense of satisfaction and usefulness⁶.

It is also extremely important for U3A students to meet other people of a similar age and who are struggling with many of the same everyday difficulties, and to take care of their own development in their company. The period of stay at U3A often results in making friendships that continue after graduation from the studies.

Graduates of universities of the third age often become the transmitters of the information obtained during their studies to their family as well as to their and friends and acquaintances. Thus, the circle of beneficiaries expands. The graduates are likely to serve the younger generation with the knowledge they have acquired and often become subjects of evangelization and culture. This is the way of strengthening integration, because themes and interests in common are found.

Appropriate activation of seniors at universities of the third age has advantages both for them and younger generations⁷.

2. The Teaching of the Church as an Inspiration for Establishing U3A at UPJPII

When establishing the University of the Third Age at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow the founders were guided by the teaching of the Church expressed, among others, in the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* by John Paul II. The Pope writes: “while fulfilling the tasks common to all universities – that is, in teaching, research and service activities – a Catholic University has at the same time the institutional duty to refer in its work to the inspiration and light of the Christian message”⁸.

6 J. Dziedzic, *Starość to nie obciążenie*, <https://miscyjne.pl/ks-prof-jan-dziedzic-starosc-to-nie-obciazenie-rozmowa/> (11.01.2023).

7 J. Dziedzic, *Starość to nie obciążenie*, <https://miscyjne.pl/ks-prof-jan-dziedzic-starosc-to-nie-obciazenie-rozmowa/> (11.01.2023).

8 Jan Paweł II, *Konstytucja apostolska o Uniwersytetach katolickich Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Rzym 1990, part 1, 14, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/konstytucje/o_uniwersytetach_15081990.html (10.01.2023).

This document had a significant impact on defining the pastoral and educational program of the emerging U3A⁹.

In the teaching of the Church, as expressed in the words of John Paul II, it is emphasized that the elderly must be looked at primarily in light of their human dignity, which “does not disappear with the passage of years and deterioration of the mental and physical condition”¹⁰. At the same time, the pope encouraged seniors to develop their interests, broaden their minds, appreciate friendship with others and discover their place in the Church, where every person has equal value and dignity¹¹.

From the point of view of faith, the elderly are a gift. Benedict XVI said: “When advances in medicine and other factors lead to the extension of human life, it is important to recognize the presence of an increasing number of elderly people as a blessing for society”¹². The obligation to respect the elderly is present in the Old Testament and results from God’s commandment: “Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live long and prosper in the land that the Lord is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16). This biblical command has been taken over by the Church¹³.

The hallmark of a truly human civilization is respect and love for the elderly. The lack of a positive attitude towards seniors marginalizes

9 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 300.

10 Jan Paweł II, *Ludzie starsi w życiu społeczeństwa*, List do uczestników II Światowego Zgromadzenia poświęconego problemom starzenia się ludzkości, 03.04.2002, p. 9, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/ludzie_starsi_03042002 (10.01.2023).

11 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Spotkanie z osobami Trzeciego Wieku w Walencji*, 08.11.1982, in: *O cierpieniu. Wypowiedzi Ojca Świętego do chorych i pracowników służby zdrowia (1982–1984)*, vol. 2, Niepokalanów 1988, p. 65.

12 Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie w Domu dla osób starszych*, 18.08.2010, <https://www.deon.pl/religia/kosciol-i-swiat/z-zycia-kosciola/art,3092,benedykt-xvi-w-domu-dla-osob-starszych.html> (10.01.2023).

13 Cf. R. Bogacz, *Starość w Biblii*, in: *Starość. Problem i szansa? Refleksja pastoralnoteologiczna*, ed. J. Dziedzic, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UPJPII, Kraków 2015, p. 18.

these people and condemns them to loneliness, comparable to real social death¹⁴.

Care for the elderly has always played a key role in the pastoral mission of the Church. In the teaching of John Paul II we read:

It is necessary for the Church to develop pastoral care for people of *the third age*. Care that will make them aware of their creative role and the meaning of illness and partial limitations, that will emphasize reconciliation between generations, that the value of every life does not end here, but opens itself to everlasting life¹⁵.

Pope Francis also calls for respect of the elderly. He gives assurance that the Church looks at the elderly with “love, appreciation and great respect”. He compares them to a tree that continues to bear fruit and, despite the burden of years, can make its essential contribution to society¹⁶.

Therefore, activity as well as the model of education proposed to seniors by the church university, that is the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, has a religious profile¹⁷. The character of the university and the name of St. John Paul II, its patron saint, impose obligation on the U3A, operating within the university, to give special attention not only to a rise in the level of general knowledge but also to religious formation of those who participate.

3. The Beginnings and Development of U3A Activity at UPJPII in Krakow

The University of the Third Age operating at UPJPII was founded in 2011. The offer was addressed to people who have already completed their

14 See: Jan Paweł II, *Ludzie starsi w życiu społeczeństwa*, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/ludzie_starsi_03042002 (10.01.2023).

15 Jan Paweł II, *Spotkanie z osobami Trzeciego Wieku w Walencji*, p. 66.

16 See: Franciszek, *Musimy działać na rzecz kultury życia*, Przemówienie w Święto Dziadków, 15.10.2016, <https://www.deon.pl/kosciol/serwis-papieski/papiez-do-seniorow-musimy-dzialac-na-rzecz-kultury-life,412376> (10.01.2023).

17 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku jako forma twórczego wsparcia osób starszych*, in: *Pięknie jest być starszym. O starości interdyscyplinarnie*, eds. M. Cholewa, M. Duda, P. Kroczyk, Wydawnictwo Scriptum, Kraków 2018, p. 121.

professional activity, but feel the need for further intellectual and religious development¹⁸.

In the academic year 2011/2012, 241 people started their studies at U3A. During the following years, the number of students steadily grew until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite that, 45 people left U3A to undertake full-time theological studies¹⁹ at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow. At the beginning of the 2019/2020 academic year the University of the Third Age had as many as 550 students. The period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when classes were conducted remotely, online, resulted in a temporary reduction in the number of students to 250. Since October 2022, in person classes have been fully restored. The organization of cultural and occasional events also resumed, including visits to monuments, trips and pilgrimages. The management of U3A expects to return to the before pandemic number of 550 students studying at U3A.

Candidates for studying at the U3A UPJPII are recruited from among people for whom religious formation and expanding their general knowledge are equally important. The courses offered at U3A, operating at UPJPII, guarantees that their needs will be treated with special care. A defining characteristic of our U3A is its affiliation with a church university, which is UPJPII, that is why taking care of the spiritual development of students and the relevant religious courses offered are among the programs basic tasks²⁰. Yet, U3A students are offered a program that is not limited only to pastoral formation. Apart from the objective of spiritual development UPJPII in Krakow presents seniors with an interesting and constantly enriched educational offer.

Plenary lectures have been a basic form of the educational program from the very beginning, and over time have been supplemented with seminar workshops. The thematic scope of the classes is successively expanded. At the same time, the additional courses offered are

18 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku jako forma twórczego wsparcia osób starszych*, p. 121.

19 See I. Szlachta, *Z UTW na studia stacjonarne*, „Vita Academica” (2018) nr 1 (94), p. 99.

20 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Spotkania o charakterze religijnym*, in: *Seniorzy na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, red. J. Dziedzic, I. Szlachta, Fundacja im. Świętej Królowej Jadwigi dla UPJPII, Kraków 2016, p. 115.

constantly being enriched according to the needs reported by the students²¹.

During its existence, the U3A UPJPII has published several books. The first was released in 2015: *Old age. Problem or opportunity? Pastoral Theological Reflection*, edited by J. Dziedzic. On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the U3A UPJPII in 2016, the book *Seniors at the Pontifical University of John Paul II* was published, edited by J. Dziedzic and I. Szlachta. In 2017, the first book of an academic series was launched, containing lectures delivered to students of the U3A UPJPII. The publication, entitled *In Search of Mature Faith. A Pastoral and Theological Reflection*, edited by J. Dziedzic, was devoted to the issues of religiosity and faith. The book entitled *The Model of Educating Seniors at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow*, edited by J. Dziedzic, was published in 2018. It was dedicated to the oldest student of the U3A, Dr. Barbara Swolkień, who celebrated her 100th birthday on November 16, 2018. The year 2019 bore fruit in form of the second volume of lectures at the U3A: *In Concern for Human Dignity. A Philosophical and Theological Study*, edited by J. Dziedzic. Currently, the third volume of this series is being prepared: *Man and Spiritual Development. A Pastoral and Theological Study*, edited by J. Dziedzic²².

The U3A students are among the authors of the articles written for *Vita Academica*, the information bulletin of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, in which a record of all important events in the life of their community is kept. The U3A also has its own website <https://utw.upjp2.edu.pl/> where information for students is given, e.g., regulations, information on subsequent recruitments, news, schedules or topics of lectures. Seniors from U3A are also involved in various charity events such as organizing fundraisers and in-kind gifts for those in need²³.

In the academic year 2017/2018, the courses offered for seniors was extended to full-time studies in systematic theology at UPJPII.

21 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku na UPJPII w Krakowie*, in: *Model kształcenia seniorów na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 29.

22 See J. Dziedzic, *Początki i rozwój UTW na UPJPII*, in: *Aktywny senior z przyszłością. 10 lat działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku na UPJPII w Krakowie*, ed. J. Dziedzic, Fundacja im. Świętej Królowej Jadwigi dla UPJPII, Kraków 2021, p. 35–36.

23 Cf. M. Obrok, I. Szlachta, *Historia działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku*, in: *Seniorzy na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 21–22.

The studies constitute the second stage of the model of senior education introduced at the Pontifical University²⁴.

The eleven-year experience of U3A activity at the Pontifical University shows that the proposed program is appropriate. This is evidenced by statements from participants confirming that their expectations were met. Senior students emphasized that during their studies at U3A they felt part of the community, deepened their faith and noticed the importance of the arts and culture in human formation²⁵.

The school, which is U3A at the Pontifical University, along with other such units in Poland, is part of the creative model of supporting seniors in their personal development²⁶.

4. The Theological Profile of Lectures and Workshops

The program, included in the pastoral and educational offer of U3A UPJPII is a result of the university profile accepted at its formation²⁷. The university has a religious profile and implements a pastoral and educational program, which includes lectures and workshops which cover the Bible and anthropology, ethics, theology, philosophy and history of the Church, as well as educational and cultural courses (religious tourism, theatre arts. It is a form of creative support for seniors. Theology, which deals with getting to know God and reflecting on Revelation, has a leading place in the educational offer of U3A.

The basic form of educational activity, as already mentioned, are plenary lectures. The subjects of lectures are selected in such a way that the content conveyed is also an element of the religious formation of the participants. The lecturers are academic instructors of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow and invited guests. 115 lecturers are involved in conducting classes for our students. About 650 such plenary lectures have taken place so far, among them: lectures on systematic

24 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Starość to nie obciążenie*, <https://misyjne.pl/ks-prof-jan-dziedzic-sta-roszc-to-nie-obciazenie-rozmowa/> (11.01.2023).

25 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Seniorzy na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 12.

26 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Edukacja seniorów na uniwersytetach trzeciego wieku*, p. 25.

27 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 288.

theology, ecclesiology, biblical topics, issues of spirituality and moral theology have been delivered. In addition to these, lectures covering other topics, are offered including: philosophical issues, psychology and health care, history of the Church, history of art and religious literature.

Plenary lectures are complemented by seminar-type classes in the form of biblical and liturgical workshops. Every U3A student who wants to broaden his knowledge of the Holy Bible²⁸ can participate in the biblical workshops. During these workshops, participants discussed: the stages of the creation of the Holy Bible, compared the biblical texts with historical records of events, confronted the biblical descriptions with those of natural science, analysed the texts of the New Testament regarding the life and activity of Christ, learned about the differences between the Old and New Testaments regarding the concept of God and the relationship between God and man, as well as many other topics²⁹. According to the participants, the Bible workshops are a much desired extension of the material presented during the lectures and contribute to better understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and thus bring them even closer to God³⁰.

For those who were interested, a second type of seminar was organized in the form of liturgical workshops. These workshops familiarized the participants with the liturgy³¹. During classes, held once a week, participants learn about the liturgy of the Holy Mass, periods of the liturgical year, the course of the Paschal Triduum, the way of reciting the liturgy of the hours according to the breviary, selected documents regarding the liturgy, types and colours of liturgical vestments, liturgical vessels and liturgical books and the meaning of personal prayer with the rosary, as well as the service of the Way of Light. During the classes, like during the biblical workshops, there is an opportunity to discuss the previously presented topics.

28 Cf. G. Wąchol, *Warsztaty biblijne*, in: *Model kształcenia seniorów na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 47–49.

29 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 291.

30 Cf. G. Wąchol, *Warsztaty biblijne*, p. 49–50.

31 Cf. M. Kremer, *Warsztaty liturgiczne*, in: *Model kształcenia seniorów na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 52–53.

Workshops on the liturgy are often preceded by common services held in the university chapel and related to a given liturgical season, e.g., the Rosary in October, the Way of the Cross during Lent or the Way of Light during the Easter period. The participants of the liturgical workshops are responsible for preparing the liturgical setting before each Holy Mass for U3A students. The knowledge gained during the liturgical workshops allows the students to deepen their faith and to consciously participate in the liturgy, and thus it contributes to their better understanding of the sacrament³².

5. Optional Educational and Development Classes and Other Forms of Activity

Plenary lectures and workshops of a seminar nature are complemented with the offer of additional educational and development classes. This includes foreign language and computer courses, tourism, sports and cultural activities. Among German, Italian and English language courses, organized for U3A students, the latter ones were most popular. Due to the computer equipment accessible to the students in the UPJPII Main Library, the first computer classes were organized in 2013. Both English language classes and computer training were included in the project Active senior with a future!”

Tourism was the first organized form of extracurricular activities prepared for U3A students³³. The offer was carried out in the form of walks around Krakow, combined with visiting monuments, trips and pilgrimages in Poland and abroad. Within the program of foreign religious tourism, the students visited the Holy Land, Greece, Italy and Vilnius.

An important proposal in the educational program of U3A is the cultural offer. It includes joint going to the theatre, the opera or to a concert as well as meetings during which the participants pursue their dance,

³² Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 292.

³³ Cf. I. Szlachta, *Turystyka*, in: *Seniorzy na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 203.

vocal or acting passions³⁴. Students also have the opportunity to develop their creative interests by participating in artistic or in arts and crafts workshops³⁵.

Appreciating the role of systematic physical activity in maintaining physical and mental fitness by seniors, sports activities are included in the program. The participants have access to the UPJPII gym free of charge. Moreover, thanks to the funds obtained under the grant project “Active senior with a future!” the “Dances in a Circle” workshop has been extended and new classes improving the physical condition of the students have been implemented³⁶.

U3A at UPJPII also undertakes a number of different initiatives, responding to the current needs of seniors. These include workshops on social relations, social media, dietetics, cosmetics and rehabilitation. Theatrical workshops, arts and crafts workshops, mental gymnastics and a choir³⁷ are always very popular.

The funds obtained under the project “Active senior with a future!” played an important role in the university’s activity. This grant is co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund. It has been carried out at the UTW UPJPII since 2019. The project is divided into 3 editions with 150 participants in each. Every single edition consists of 4 tasks, including artistic manual activities, sports activities that improve physical condition, educational activities developing passions and interests of the participants and educational activities combining science and hobbies. Recently, the publication summarizing 10 years of the university’s activity for seniors has been released as part of the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused some difficulties in the implementation of the project due to the time when not all the classes could take

34 Cf. J. Dziedzic, Program kulturalny, in: *Aktywny senior z przyszłością. 10 lat działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku na UPJPII w Krakowie*, p. 100.

35 Cf. U. Kiwała, Warsztaty artystyczne, in: *Seniorzy na Uniwersytecie Papieskim Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 131.

36 Cf. J. Dziedzic, Turystyka i sport, in: *Aktywny senior z przyszłością. 10 lat działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku na UPJPII w Krakowie*, p. 99.

37 J. Dziedzic, Starość to nie obciążenie, <https://misyjne.pl/ks-prof-jan-dziedzic-starosc-to-nie-obciazenie-rozmowa/> (11.01.2023).

place. Therefore, the deadline for its implementation was extended to June 2024.

U3A students can participate in university events and meetings with other senior organizations operating in the country and abroad³⁸. U3A cooperates with similar units in Poland and Europe. Our university has hosted representatives of the University of the Third Age from Rutigliano near Bari, the University College Algebra from Zagreb and a group of seniors from Berlin. U3A UPJPII participates in the Third Age Forum, i.e., annual international conferences devoted to senior issues³⁹.

6. Religious Formation

Elderly people have their own beliefs and principles of life, which are characterized by great trust in God and the institution of the Church, and their views are characterized by coherence of beliefs and actions, a uniform image of the world where the sphere of religion and worldliness are not clearly separated.⁴⁰ More often does old age pose questions about the meaning and dignity of life, about the vocation and destiny of man. Elderly people appreciate the value of prayer, religiosity, morality and spiritual life⁴¹. This is due to the fact that eschatological problems are becoming more and more important for them. Therefore, candidates willing to study at U3A UPJPII are seniors who want to combine gaining knowledge with deepening their faith.

U3A at the Pontifical University in Krakow attaches great importance to the problem of deepening the faith and spiritual development of the students. Consequently, the message conveyed to the students in the educational and the religious programs complement each other⁴².

38 See: J. Dziedzic, *Początki i rozwój UTW na UPJPII*, p. 33.

39 J. Dziedzic, *Współpraca z organizacjami senioralnymi i inne formy aktywności*, in: *Aktywny senior z przyszłością. 10 lat działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku na UPJPII w Krakowie*, p. 110.

40 W. Przygoda, *Wyzwania duszpasterskie wobec osób w podeszłym wieku*, in: *Starość. Problem i szansa? Refleksja pastoralnoteologiczna*, ed. J. Dziedzic, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UPJPII, Kraków 2015, p. 79–80.

41 W. Przygoda, *Wyzwania duszpasterskie wobec osób w podeszłym wieku*, p. 83.

42 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Pastoralno-edukacyjny program dla seniorów na Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku w Papieskim Uniwersytecie Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, p. 288.

The religious formation of students is one of the basic tasks of the University of the Third Age operating at UPJPII. It is carried out on the basis of a selection of lectures on theological and ascetic topics, seminar classes in the form of biblical and liturgical workshops, and a religious program based on prayer gatherings. "Through prayer, man becomes involved in the activity of God and man's activity also becomes a part of God's activity"⁴³. The Eucharist is the most important of prayer gatherings offered. It should be noted that the Holy Mass is the main point of all major religious and occasional events. Apart from the Eucharist, the days of recollection and the Stations of the Cross, organized during the Lent⁴⁴, are occasions for the students to pray together.

Students attending the liturgical workshops also take part in common services preceding their classes. The type of service (rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the Stations of Light) depends on when the workshops take place, during the liturgical year. Religious attitudes are also shaped by domestic and foreign pilgrimages organized at U3A⁴⁵.

Retirement age "opens up new possibilities for the elderly to continue their apostolic work, which they should undertake courageously, overcoming the temptations of nostalgic closure in memories of the past"⁴⁶. Yet, in order to enable seniors to fulfil their vocation in the Church and in the world, they should be given pastoral support. Therefore, U3A UPJPII as a church university includes helping the students to prepare to take up ministry in their parishes. It is primarily about helping in preparations for liturgies, conducting charity work, working in support groups and senior groups. It is also about evangelizing in one's local environment, especially shaping the attitudes of one's children and grandchildren⁴⁷.

It seems that this is well reflected in the words contained in the program describing U3A activities: "Their time at U3A UPJPII in Krakow

43 Cf. E. Robek SAC, *Powołanie chrześcijanina do modlitwy nieustannej w życiu codziennym*, „Perspectiva—Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne” 4 (2005) nr 2, p. 176.

44 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Edukacja seniorów na uniwersytetach trzeciego wieku*, p. 30.

45 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Formacja religijna*, in: *Aktywny senior z przyszłością. 10 lat działalności Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wiek na UPJPII w Krakowie*, p. 61.

46 Jan Paweł II, *Adhortacja apostołska Christifideles laici*, 4, quoted after W. Przygoda, *Wyzwania duszpasterskie wobec osób w podeszłym wieku*, p. 98.

47 Cf. J. Dziedzic, *Formacja religijna*, p. 58.

should form students in such a way that they can undertake the mission of preaching the Gospel and testify with their lives that they are disciples of Christ”⁴⁸.

Let the words of one of the students (D. Gębuś) be the evaluation of the religious formation implemented at U3A UPJPII: “You can really feel God’s spirit at our university”.

Conclusion

The combination of pastoral care with the education of seniors seems to be a very important task for the Church today. The increase in the number of elderly results in new challenges to be met regarding people of the third age. Considering the fact that many seniors enjoy good health, the expectations of this social group in the area of education and pastoral care are still increasing.

Among offers directed to seniors by relevant institutions, there are many universities of the third age with a Catholic profile. One of such is the U3A operating at the UPJPII in Krakow. It stands out against other programs of this type because of its program of pastoral and educational character. Its religious specificity is defined by lectures and workshops on the Bible and anthropology, ethics and theology, philosophy and history of the Church. Apart from the pastoral profile, there is also an educational one, which involves physical activity, religious tourism and a cultural programme.

The above article, which presents the pastoral model of educating seniors at U3A UPJPII in Krakow, familiarises us with the function fulfilling by specific schools that educates seniors in regards to the teaching of the Church and its evangelical mission. The proposal of the program, that is carried out at this particular U3A and described above, may help in organising similar Polish units, and thus contribute to the further development of the idea of a New Evangelization, involving not only young people but also seniors. Inclusion of the latter group in educational programs is important, and is confirmed by the fact that a large group of the graduates of U3A have undertaken full-time five-year studies

48 Cf. J. Dziezic, *Spotkania o charakterze religijnym*, p. 116.

in theology. For personal development never ends, but lasts until the end of one's life.

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