
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34768/r1.2023.v492.05>

Stefan Dudra*

University of Zielona Góra

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4196-1305>

e-mail: s.dudra@inpa.uz.zgora.pl

THE FELLOWSHIP OF ORTHODOX YOUTH AS AN ELEMENT IN THE ACTIVATION OF THE ORTHODOX LAITY

THE FELLOWSHIP OF ORTHODOX YOUTH AS AN ELEMENT IN
THE ACTIVATION OF THE ORTHODOX LAITY

Keywords: orthodoxy, laity, Fellowship of Orthodox Youth.

Orthodox fellowships, with their centuries-old tradition were the main centers of Orthodox cultural life. They were involved in charitable, welfare and educational activities, financed the establishment of hospitals and shelters, and organized secular and religious celebrations. Through their publishing activities, they shaped the awareness of the faithful. During the period of the Polish People's Republic, their activities were very limited for political reasons. It was only the establishment of the Brotherhood of Orthodox Youth in the 1980s that later became an impulse for the activation of the Orthodox laity. Its activities contributed to the emergence of many social religious initiatives. This was facilitated by the opportunities created by the socio-political changes in Poland after 1989.

***Stefan Dudra** – professor of humanities in history, scientific interests: religious policy and nationality policy of the state.

BRACTWO MŁODZIEŻY PRAWOSŁAWNEJ JAKO ELEMENT AKTYWIZACJI PRAWOSŁAWNEGO LAIKATU

Słowa kluczowe: prawosławie, laikat, Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej.

Bractwa cerkiewne ze swoją wielowiekową tradycją były głównymi centrami prawosławnego życia kulturalnego. Zajmowały się działalnością charytatywno-opiekuńczą, oświatową, finansowały tworzenie szpitali i przytułków, były organizatorami uroczystości świeckich i religijnych. Poprzez działalność wydawniczą kształtowały świadomość wiernych. W okresie Polski Ludowej, ze względów politycznych ich działalność była bardzo ograniczona. Dopiero powstanie w latach 80. ubiegłego stulecia Bractwa Młodzieży Prawosławnej stało się w późniejszym okresie impulsem do uaktywnienia prawosławnego laikatu. Jego działalność przyczyniła się do powstania wielu społecznych inicjatyw o charakterze religijnym. Sprzyjały temu możliwości stworzone w wyniku przemian społeczno-politycznych w Polsce po 1989 roku.

Introduction

Orthodox fellowships have a centuries-long history and are a manifestation of the conciliar nature of the Orthodox Church life. In the past, they brought together the laity as the main centers of cultural life, charitable and welfare activities (taking care of widows and orphans), education (founding and running schools, printing houses, publishing houses), and they financed the creation of hospitals and shelters as well as organized secular and religious celebrations. Through extensive publishing activity, they shaped the consciousness of the faithful and slowed down the process of the Orthodox population leaving for other denominations. They also strove to raise the moral and intellectual level of the clergy. This was manifested by the reformation slogans. An important element of the fellowships' activity was the care for churches and clergy. The confraternities often became centers which defended Orthodoxy in its broadest sense – religious, national, and economic¹. In the interwar period, there were about 20 Orthodox church fellowships. Their functioning was not regulated by law, so the authorities generally sought to liquidate them or limit their activities. The authorities also refused to allow the registration of new ones (the

¹The origins of the fellowships date back to the 15th century; they were established in the Ruthenian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (the first ones were founded in Vilnius and Lviv) among the Orthodox bourgeoisie competing with the Catholic patriciate. For more information, see: Mironowicz (2003); Dmitruk (2015), pp. 45-56.

functioning of the fellowships was finally regulated in the Internal Statute of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church of 1938) (Mironowicz 2005, pp.161-162). They were important centers of lay involvement in the life of the Orthodox Church. They also defended the national and religious interests of Belarusians and Ukrainians, which was not always understood by the church hierarchy that feared a close connection with the national movement and the promoted slogans of Belarusianization and Ukrainization of the Orthodox Church. The national issues raised by the fellowships were also viewed with concern by the state authorities².

The aim of this article is to analyze the activity of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in the aspect of engaging the Orthodox laity in the People's Republic of Poland and after the democratic changes of 1989. It is shown that the decision of Orthodox youth activists to reject a nationalistic foundation as a basis for building the Fellowship broadened its scope of influence, making it as multinational as the entire Orthodox Church in Poland. In addition, the article aims to demonstrate how the possibilities and forms of the Fellowship's activities evolved as a result of the socio-political changes in Poland after 1989, while also cultivating the traditions of Orthodox organizations that operated centuries ago.

In this article, I use the terms: Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and Orthodox Church, monastery and convent interchangeably.

Socio-political conditions of the fellowships' activity in the People's Republic of Poland and the creation of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth

In post-war Poland, the activities of the laity were hampered due to the restrictive state policy and the unfavorable position of the majority of the Orthodox hierarchy. Despite the complicated circumstances, the first parish fellowships were established immediately after the war. For instance, in August 1946, a fellowship was established at the parish of St. Jan Klimak in Wola in Warsaw, on the initiative of Fr. Aleksander Czubuk-Podolski. In 1949, the Orthodox church fellowship at the parish in Topilec, which was founded in 1938, was reactivated (Misijuk 2005, p. 184). Until the end of the People's Republic of Poland, state authorities aimed at closing the activities of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAKP) within the church walls. Any attempts to go beyond these walls were quickly suppressed.

²In 1926, the Synod of Bishops drew up a model statute for the fellowships to prevent a strong emphasis on national elements in their activities. The main goals were to revitalize religious and moral life, take care of the internal arrangement of the church, participate in the preparation of festive services, and perform Christian charitable works. For more information, see: Mironowicz (2003), pp. 173-174.

The authorities also discouraged the promotion of religious activity among children and youth. Clergymen were not allowed to prepare sports fields or to conduct sports activities in Grodzisk. In 1953, camps for Orthodox children in Krynki, co-organized by the local parish, were closed. Meetings with both youth and adults, including choir rehearsals outside the church were prohibited (Sychowicz 2013, pp. 201-202).

The late 1960s saw a process of revival in youth circles and among some of the adult Orthodox community. It was during this period that the genesis of the post-war organizations uniting the Orthodox laity should be sought. One such organization was the *sestrychestvo*, which operated in Wrocław under the direction of Walentyna Szymańska. Such meetings were also held in other centers (e.g. Białystok, Hajnówka, Drohiczyn, and Warsaw). As a result, young people from Warsaw organized a pilgrimage to the monastery of St. Onufry in Jabłeczna in 1970. According to Bishop Jeremiasz (Anchimiuk), the Church needed: “organized activity of the laity, since church structures primarily focus on liturgical life and catechization. However, various manifestations of church life in the sphere of social and political life, or organizational work in areas where the clergy cannot reach due to various types of limitations, is precisely the field for the activity of such organizations” (Charkiewicz 1995, p. 30).

Initially, the activation of Orthodox youth occurred through catechization meetings, which were held periodically in most parishes. In addition to religious matters, important social issues were also discussed, such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and mixed marriages. In general, young people’s participation in parish life was in most cases satisfactory, but it was limited to issues related to their own parish. However, there was a lack of contact and cooperation among youth from different parishes or diocesan centers. This was particularly challenging for Orthodox youth in the Western and Northern Territories. The separation from the ‘center’ of Orthodoxy in Poland, as well as living and functioning in denominational isolation as a minority, led to a growing departure from Orthodoxy and secularization of life. The “Vistula Operation” in 1947 was a decisive element in this situation. As a result, the Orthodox Church in this area functioned under diasporic conditions (Gerent 2007, Dudra 2009).

The breakthrough moment that changed the form of youth activation was the creation of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth³. It was established

³The organization was first called the Circle of Orthodox Theologians, and later changed to the Circle of Orthodox Theologians of Students of the Christian Theological Academy in 1985. Additionally, the Circle of Orthodox Theologians of Theological Schools, Laity, and Laic Youth was also used. The driving force behind the establishment

as a grassroots initiative, and as Sławomir Makal stated, it surprised both the hierarchy and priests in parishes (Radziukiewicz 1992, p. 23). Initially, it conducted its activities without the official permission from the Orthodox hierarchy. This was due to the negative attitude of the state authorities, including the Office for Religious Affairs, towards the religious youth movement. However, Metropolitan Bazyli (Doroszkiwicz) did not prohibit its activities. As already mentioned, the origins of the Fellowship can be found in the youth meetings organized at the end of the 1960s in Warsaw. Their unofficial venue was the Orthodox Theological Seminary and the apartment of Dr. Jan Anchimiuk (later Bishop Jeremiasz), who years later stated: “[i]n the late 1960s, it was clear that religious lessons and sermons did not reach everyone, that very many people had a false or no idea about Orthodox life” (Charkiewicz 1995, p. 13). The meetings were attended by Orthodox students from both the Christian Theological Academy and secular universities.

The first official meeting of representatives of Orthodox youth was held in the fall of 1970 at the residence of Metropolitan Bazyli. Throughout the 1970s, activities were not very extensive. “We were also afraid of the reaction of the state authorities, the security service, so the meetings of the working group were kept secret”, stated Bishop Jeremiasz⁴. During this period, however, contacts were made with youth from other centers. It is worth noting that the meetings organized by the clergy in Białystok (Father Serafin Żeleźniakowicz), Hajnówka (Father Leoncjusz Tofiluk) and Drohiczyn (Father Grzegorz Misijuk) were similar in nature. Youth choirs, which were organized in the 1970s, also played an important role in engaging young people. These meetings facilitated the exchange of views and initiated discussions about the problems of youth. They also encouraged the search for new forms of participation in the life of the Church. As Eugeniusz Czykwin noted, “The need to work with youth and adults was and still is of primary importance in our church, but in the 1970s only a few clergymen undertook such work. In the 1970s, only a few clergymen undertook such work. The social and political organizations in which the Orthodox participated were, at best, indifferent to the matters of faith and the Church, while the vast majority of the clergy and hierarchy were reconciled with the

of the Fellowship was Jan Anchimiuk, as noted in Kierdaszuk (1983, pp. 12-14) and Boltryk (2000, pp. 8-9).

⁴Despite the measures taken, the meetings of Orthodox youth were supervised by the security service. The meetings were under surveillance, and special reports were issued on their progress. See: Institute of National Remembrance BU 01283/1659, k. 278, Reports of secret collaborator “Robert” of 29 November 1971 and 14 December 1971.

state of the Church's confinement to the walls of churches" (Charkiewicz 1995, p. 13; Gościk, Romanowicz 2010, p. 105).

The first organized form of activity was the creation of the Circle of Orthodox Theologians on 23 April 1980. Its main goal was to promote theological knowledge and to develop spiritual life). Soon after, in May, a youth pilgrimage to St. Góra Grabarka was organized. It took place on 9-11 May and attracted around 70 participants (Kierdaszuk 1983, pp. 12-14; Matreńczyk 1989, p. 7). The Grabarka Monastery played an important role in creating organized Orthodox youth activities in Poland. Its influence helped to "instill in the future Fellowship the equality of all nationalities as the basic principle of the organization and preserve its supranational character"⁵. The establishment of the Circle of Orthodox Theologians became an impulse to create a nationwide youth organization. Nevertheless, due to the lack of permission from the authorities to establish the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, the Circle's activities were only expanded and the name was changed to the Circle of Orthodox Theologians of Theological Schools, Secular and Lay Youth. In fact, the name was not adopted and remained only in official documents until 1991. The term 'Fellowship' was used colloquially (Hajduczenia 1990, p. 46).

A sense of freedom associated with the emergence of the Solidarity movement also inspired the young generation of the PAKP faithful. The youth and intelligentsia of Belarusian, Ukrainian or Lemko origin became more active. The main goal was to create an organization that would include all Orthodox youth. In 1981, a Coordinating Council (consisting of Ałła Nesteruk, Borys Kierdaszuk, Sławomir Makal, Mirosław Matreńczyk, and Sławomir Moczarski) was established for the purpose of drafting a program document entitled "Fellowship of Orthodox Youth – goals, tasks and forms of their realization". This document served as a manifesto for the future nationwide organization. According to Eugeniusz Czykwin, its establishment was "an attempt at a self-saving of our faith, culture, and tradition". It resulted from the crisis of traditional consciousness and ties that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, which threatened complete Polonization and departure from the Orthodox Church (Kierdaszuk 1983 p. 15; Matreńczyk 2009, pp. 8-10). In 1982, the first statute was passed, and during the First General Assembly on St. Góra Grabarka (15-17 October), the first president of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (Eugeniusz

⁵Jarosław Charkiewicz emphasized that "of great importance for the formation of the organization was the attitude of the late ihumenia Barbara (Grosser), a person who understood the youth and helped them by making the monastery available for subsequent meetings", see: Sawicki 2007, p. 11.

Czykwin) was elected⁶. The main goal of the new organization was to create an Orthodox Christian consciousness, promote the idea of the Fellowship among the clergy and young people, organize pilgrimages, summer and winter camps, and establish contacts with young people from other countries. Later, these activities were expanded to include sports, ecumenical and ecological programs, foreign language courses, icon-writing classes, and retreat activities. The activities were carried out on the premises of local parishes and church centers in Białowieża, Krzywiec, Jaczno, Grabarka and in Cieplice, which is the largest Orthodox recreation and conference center in Poland. It is one of the main bases for conducting a wide range of activities (ecumenical meetings, retreats, conferences, training courses and summer and winter camps were organized there) (Hajduczenia 1990, p. 46). In the first half of the 1980s, the first youth centers were established (initially functioning as Diocesan Councils of Orthodox Youth) in the dioceses of Wrocław and Szczecin (1984), Białystok and Gdańsk (1985), and Warsaw and Lublin (1986). In 1987, 28 circles were active in the Białystok Diocese, 18 in the Warsaw-Bielsk Diocese, and three in the Wrocław-Szczecin Diocese (Charkiewicz 1995, pp. 64-65). The Fellowship embraced all Orthodox youth in Poland. It was the first lay Orthodox Christian movement in the socialist bloc, and at the same time a mass movement referring to the traditions of former Orthodox confraternities. The new organization's supranational character was a crucial factor in its development and subsequent popularity. Nationality as a limiting influence was rejected. It became as multi-national as the whole Orthodoxy in Poland (Mironowicz 2005, p. 324; Dudra 2019, p. 793).

Functioning of the Orthodox Youth Fellowship after 1989

As a result of the democratic changes taking place in Poland after 1989, the faithful were given the opportunity to join secular organizations that carried out the tasks related to their religion. The Act of 17 May 1989 on Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Religion allowed churches and religious associations to establish organizations aimed at carrying out activities for religious formation, public worship and counteracting social

⁶The elections were held in an original way, the names of the candidates for the position of chairperson (E. Czykwin, M. Matreńczyk and S. Makala) were written on separate sheets of paper and put in the Bible. After the common prayer, the superior of the monastery Barbara took out the sheet with the name of E. Czywkin. The first board was composed of Irena Iwanow, Aleksy Andrejuk, Sławomir Makal, Arkadiusz Sawicki and Katarzyna Szczur. Father Leoncjusz Tofiluk became the spiritual guardian of the Fellowship. For more information on the creation of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, see: *Byłem prawosławnym posłem...* 2007, pp. 41-50.

pathologies and their effects. Relevant provisions were also reflected in the law of 4 July 1991, in which church organizations and Orthodox fellowships were distinguished. They were given the status of legal persons of the Church and were included in its organizational structures⁷.

In the new socio-political realities, the Orthodox youth expanded their activities. In the new statute adopted at the 10th General Assembly (November 9, 1991), the organization's name was changed from Circle of Orthodox Theologians to the previously used Fellowship of Orthodox Youth⁸. Its main goals were defined, among others: to foster a sense of identity and unity among the Orthodox population in accordance with their religion, to awaken and develop interests in theological knowledge and spiritual life, to shape Christian attitudes of its members in everyday life, to provide mutual assistance, and develop and support social-cultural and educational activities in the spirit of understanding and cooperation between different denominations and religions; to counteract negative social phenomena, to establish contacts with Orthodox youth of other countries, and to assist in contacts with representatives of other Christian denominations and other religions (Dudra 2019, pp. 793-794). At the same time, the beginning of the 1990s brought a crisis in the activity of the Fellowship. Andrzej Sadowski (1991, p. 39) rightly observes that formal restrictions on religious practices (in this case, the organized activities of Orthodox youth), actually increased their attractiveness. This was due to the expression of personal choice and associated courage and risk, defined

⁷They have a legal status similar to Catholic organizations (i.e. the law on associations does not apply to them). These are organizations established with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority, which approves their chaplain, and which operate in conjunction with the hierarchy. The legislator has also specified the purposes of Orthodox confraternities (including socio-cultural, educational, charitable and welfare activities, and those related to combating social pathologies and their consequences. See: The Act of 4 July 1991 on the State's Relationship with the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 66, item 287, art. 29. The highest authority of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth is the General Assembly (meeting once a year), which elects the Central Board, the Chairperson of the Board and the Audit Committee for a three-year term. Such structures also function at diocesan, deanery, and parish levels.

⁸After the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth was formally established, the Circle of Orthodox Theologians retained its own identity and continued its activities despite its smaller scope and influence; today its activities are connected to the Orthodox Section of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw. The core of the Circle consists of students of theology, but the meetings held at the Metropolitan Student House are also attended by students from other Warsaw universities. In 1994, alumni of the Warsaw Theological Seminary were also included in the Circle of Orthodox Theologians. The main form of activities are discussion meetings devoted to theology as well as problems and dilemmas of the modern world.

by the possibility of losses in the sphere of work, public life, and even personal freedom. At the same time, the reduction of religious practices was an important reason for the strengthening of the role of religion and religious institutions in the lives of the faithful. Signs of crisis in the Fellowship's activity were also caused by the emergence of, among others, Belarusian youth organizations, which became active alongside or even in opposition to the Fellowship. This led to divisions, often externally inspired, between Orthodox and 'Belarusians'. The emergence of Lemko and Ukrainian associations is also relevant in this context (Dudra 2019, p. 794).

The new political situation and the emerging social freedom after 1989 necessitated a shift in focus and the undertaking of new tasks to adapt to the changing external reality. The crisis phenomena were reflected in the report on the activities of the Central Board of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, which stated, among others: "[t]he political and economic changes that have recently been taking place in Poland mean that the attitude of individuals and society in general towards religion, the approach to life and its challenges, has been transformed. What once drove our youth to become active in the Church through the Fellowship's activities – enthusiasm, disinterestedness, community-mindedness and devoting one's time without a second thought to one's brothers and the Church – is now manifesting itself in the activities of fewer and fewer young people. [...] As a result, this situation may lead in the long run to the collapse of the Fellowship circles, especially in small parishes, and to the disappearance of spirituality, which we see more and more often" (Excerpts from the Report... 1992, p. 3-4). To rectify the situation, it was suggested that new ways of attracting young people to the life of the Church and the Fellowship should be found. The Fellowship's activity was strengthened by establishing its structures in the dioceses of Lublin-Chełm (1990), Przemyśl-Nowy Sącz (1992) and Łódź-Poznań (2007). The structures' task was to inspire and coordinate the work of individual circles⁹.

The Fellowship of Orthodox Youth organized various activities, including pilgrimages to monasteries and holy places (both in Poland and abroad), children's and youth camps (such as ecological, iconographic, linguistic, musical, and prayer camps), and youth exchanges (e.g. Polish-German exchanges). An important role in educational activities was

⁹It should be emphasized that in the 1980s the number of circles was steadily increasing (in 1983 organized youth work was conducted in 20 parishes; in 1986 – in 41, and in 1987 – in 50). In the 1990s, there was a stagnation in the activity of local structures; in 1994, only 34 circles were active (Charkiewicz 1995, pp. 63-68).

also played by the historical aspect (e.g. the Fellowship of the Diocese of Przemyśl and Nowy Sącz organized bicycle rallies: “The trail of St. Maxim Gorlice” and the trail of Orthodox churches destroyed during the “Vistula Operation”). The organization also collaborated with other Orthodox groups. For example, it co-organized cyclical art contests (e.g. “Monuments of Iconography in Children’s Drawings” with the editorial staff of “Nad Buhom i Narwoju”) and photography contests (“Sacred Orthodox Art” in cooperation with St. Cyril and Methodius Fellowship and the Catechetical Department of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church). In October 2002, the Legal Circle of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth was established. A group of law students from the University of Białystok provided free legal aid in various fields including labor, administrative, agricultural, civil, financial (e.g. filling out PIT forms) and criminal law. The activities of diocesan fellowships also included running choirs. It resulted from the necessity to stimulate the need and willingness of young people to sing and to learn about the musical accomplishments of the Orthodox Church (e.g. Fellowship choirs operate in the dioceses of Lublin-Chełm and Wrocław-Szczecin). It is also worth mentioning that the circle of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth activists included later Orthodox local government activists and politicians who took an active part in the parliamentary and local government life of Poland¹⁰.

Currently the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth has about 1800 members. It has the most extensive parish structures in the Białystok-Gdańsk diocese (it operates in 16 parishes) and in the Warsaw-Bielsk diocese (11 parishes). In total, there are 42 parish circles¹¹. The present tasks of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth are primarily to increase the activity of parish youth, both in the secular sphere (organizing conferences, camps, sports and recreational activities) and the spiritual sphere (deepening religious knowledge, acquiring theological knowledge). The Fellowship has intensified its activities in individual dioceses and parishes, particularly in diasporic dioceses. However, there are still challenges such as the weak (virtually nonexistent) activity of

¹⁰It is necessary to mention, among others, Eugeniusz Czykwin (who served multiple mandates from 1985-1993, 2001-2015 and the term of office 2019-2023). Among other things, it was on his initiative that the Sejm adopted a law on the relationship of the state to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church on 4 July 1991. He was also a founder and chief editor of the first newspaper published by the secular Orthodox circles “Przegląd Prawosławny”.

¹¹The Fellowship had the largest number of members in the following dioceses: Białystok-Gdańsk (480), Warsaw-Bielsk (450) and Lublin-Chełm (450), Wrocław-Szczecin (80), Łódź-Poznań (80) and Przemyśl-Nowy Sącz (80) – 30 (Dudra 2019, p. 795).

fellowships in rural parishes and the lack of cooperation between catechists and individual fellowship circles. Despite these difficulties, the Fellowship remains a permanent element in the life of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Although initially met with reluctance from the clergy, the Fellowship became a permanent element in the life of many parishes. It had field structures throughout Poland in various dioceses, deaneries, parishes, monasteries, and clerical schools¹². The Fellowship revitalized both religious and secular activities in the Church, reviving the tradition of pilgrimages and organizing summer and winter camps for children and youth. Publishing issues were taken care of, and numerous foreign contacts were established. Nowadays, the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth offers opportunities for active participation in artistic, cultural, recreational, publishing, scientific, educational, and charitable activities. These activities are the foundation of its statutory activity. All these undertakings create a diverse range of opportunities for young people to participate in the life of the Orthodox Church. Thanks to the Fellowship activities, the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church was prepared to work with lay people, and after 1989, it was able to expand its reach beyond the walls of its temples.

Conclusion

In the Orthodox Church tradition, the laity played an important role due to its spirit of conciliarism. During almost the entire period of the People's Republic of Poland, parish councils and church choirs were the primary elements of the laity's organization, as a result of the implemented religious and nationality policies. The Fellowship of Orthodox Youth came into being in the 1980s, coinciding with the rise of Solidarity and the temporary regaining of civic subjectivity. The main factor was the increased activity of Orthodox youth and intelligentsia of Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Lemko origin. The Fellowship became the first mass Orthodox lay movement in the socialist bloc. Its goal was to preserve the tradition, consciousness and culture of Orthodoxy in Poland. Later, the goals were expanded to include other areas (e.g. ecumenical, ecological or didactic programs).

¹²The structure of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth consists of three levels: central (the Central Board with the head office in Białystok), diocesan (the board in each of the six dioceses) and parish levels. There are a few fellowships which are not subject to the aforementioned division (among others, a student fellowship). The field structures of the fellowships are: Diocesan Youth Councils, Decanal Youth Councils, Parish Youth Councils, and separate fellowship groups within parishes, monasteries, and clerical schools, which have wide autonomy over activities in their area (Statut Bractwa Młodzieży... 1980).

For political reasons, the dynamism of laic initiatives occurred after 1989. Today there are several dozen different laic organizations created by adults operating within the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The examples were drawn from the activities of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, which – to a large extent – shapes the identity of the Orthodox faithful in Poland. The Fellowship has also had a significant impact on deepening the religious awareness of the Orthodox laity (Nikotorowicz 1999, pp. 171-182).

Literatura | References

- BOŁTRYK M. (2000), Przygoda z Bractwem, "Przegląd Prawosławny", No. 9, pp. 8-9.
- BYŁEM PRAWOSŁAWNYM POSŁEM. Z Eugeniuszem Czykwinem rozmawia Michał Bołtryk (2007), Orthdruk, Białystok.
- CHARKIEWICZ J. (1995), Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce. Statystyczno-historyczny zarys działalności organizacji w latach 1980-1994, Białystok.
- DMITRUK S. (2015), Teorie naukowe dotyczące powstania bractw cerkiewnych na terenie Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w XV-XVI wieku, "Wschód Europy. Studia Humanistyczno-Społeczne", 1(2), pp. 45-56.
- DUDRA S. (2009), Cerkiew w diasporze. Z dziejów prawosławnej diecezji wrocławsko-szczecińskiej, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań.
- DUDRA S. (2019), Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny w obszarze polityki wyznaniowej oraz polityki narodowościowej Polski Ludowej i III Rzeczypospolitej. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa.
- EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT on the Activities of the Central Board of the Brotherhood of Orthodox Youth in Poland for the period from 9 November 1991 to 6 November 1992 (1992), "Wiadomości Bractwa", No. 4, pp. 3-4.
- GERENT P. (2007), Prawosławie na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945-1989. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń.
- GOŚCIK M., ROMANOWICZ W. (2010), Aktywność społeczno-religijna młodzieży prawosławnej na Lubelszczyźnie, Podlaskie Centrum Kultury Prawosławnej, Biała Podlaska.
- HAJDUCCZENIA O. (1990), Wychowawcze oddziaływanie wybranych form działalności Bractwa Młodzieży Prawosławnej, "Bratczyk", pp. 46-51.

- KIERDASZUK B. (1983). Z kroniki Koła Teologów Prawosławnych, "Biuletyn Informacyjny", No. 1, pp. 12-14.
- MATREŃCZYK A. (1989), Raz jeszcze o młodzieży i Grabarce, "Tygodnik Podlaski", No. 6, p. 7.
- MATREŃCZYK A. (2009), Rodziło się Bractwo, "Przegląd Prawosławny", No. 5, pp. 8-10.
- MIRONOWICZ A. (2003), Bractwa cerkiewne w Rzeczypospolitej. Bractwo Prawosławne św. św. Cyryla i Metodego, Białystok.
- MIRONOWICZ A. (2005), Kościół prawosławny na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok.
- MISIJUK A. (2005), Parafia prawosławna św. Jana Klimaka w Warszawie na Woli, "Kalendarz Prawosławny", pp. 175-193.
- NIKOTOROWICZ J. (1999), Bractwa cerkiewne jako czynnik integrujący wyznawców prawosławia w wielokulturowym społeczeństwie, "Elpis", z. 1, pp. 171-182.
- RADZIUKIEWICZ A. (1992), Wierzymy „... wo Jedinu Swiatuju Sobornuju i Apostolskiju Cerkow”, "Przegląd Prawosławny", No 9, pp. 23-24.
- SADOWSKI A. (1991), Narody wielkie i małe. Białorusini w Polsce. Instytut Religioznawstwa Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków.
- SAWICKI D. (2007), Młodzież i Św. Góra Grabarka, "Wiadomości PAKP", No. 6, p. 11.
- STATUT Bractwa Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce (1980), <http://www.bmp.cerkiew.pl/index.php/statut> [access: 20.09.2023].
- SYCHOWICZ K. (2013), Władze komunistyczne wobec Kościołów i związków wyznaniowych w województwie białostockim w latach 1944-1975, IPN, Białystok.