

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OF CARITAS SCHOOL CIRCLE CATECHETICAL-PASTORAL STUDY

Summary

In the age of hedonism of man and the world, trivialization of human ties, and deprivation of true and authentic values, volunteering is an attitude worthy of recognition and imitation. The changes progressing in the contemporary world, especially the interest in man, attention to the civic sense of responsibility and participation in social life, and the need to integrate people at risk of social exclusion make volunteering and the ethos of service, solidarity and selflessness in action necessary pillars of society and an effective tool for educating children and youth.

In recent years, we have noticed a visible quantitative and qualitative development of the institution of Christian volunteering in the mission and activity of the Catholic Church in our country. Caritas Polska and diocesan Caritas make a huge contribution to promote the idea of volunteering. On their initiative, Parish Caritas Teams and Caritas School Circle are being established - proving that volunteering is a current offer for everyone. More and more behaviours among young citizens indicate readiness of young people to undertake Christian volunteering, which is why Caritas School Circle - as a specific form of volunteering - which brings together children and youth - very quickly became a phenomenon on a global scale.

The Church in Poland has been enjoying the development of youth volunteering in the form of Caritas School Circle since 1995. They are student organizations operating in schools, which are involved in charity and care activities carried out by diocesan and parish Caritas. In this way, they meet the natural need of children and young people to be active in the spirit of love of their neighbour. Moreover, they express the idealism of young people and their desire to give a deeper meaning to their lives. Thus, they have become an invaluable tool for shaping the "imagination of mercy" in

young people, and thus building the "civilization of love".

The

research problem discussed in this dissertation is related to the issue of the educational possibilities of the Caritas School Circle. The issues of the work focus on the following questions: to what extent are the youth organizations of the Caritas School Circle an appropriate tool that will serve as an aid in educating and developing the young generation of Poles? What is the potential of this form of voluntary activity? After all, what are the opportunities, chances and prospects for adolescents and their educators to get involved in the work of Caritas Christian volunteering? This issue is important and topical for both cognitive and practical reasons. It seems that getting to know the specificity of youth Caritas circle can help in discovering an effective form of shaping the personality and pro-social attitudes of young people. Thus, by addressing this issue, this dissertation wishes to become part of the current thinking about education. This issue is also inspired by the fact that although the Caritas School Circle are already celebrating the 25th anniversary of their existence in Poland, so far no one has undertaken a scientific analysis of the educational role of volunteering carried out within the Caritas youth community in a catechetical and pastoral approach.

In this dissertation, the method of analysis and interpretation of source materials, as well as the comparative method, were basically used. The method of research was primarily a comprehensive analysis of the content of the collected studies and the so-called accompanying observation obtained thanks to personal involvement in running Caritas School Circle. Analysis of historical, theological and socio-legal sources have become important from the point of view of the aim of this work. These sources include, among others: the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially the texts of the Second Vatican Council, statements of the post-conciliar popes, other documents of the Holy See, as well as publications of the Polish Bishops' Conference and pastoral letters of Polish bishops. In addition, it has become particularly important to thoroughly analyse the literature on the subject on volunteering and Caritas School Circles, including methodological documents and manuals for educators. Relating the conclusions of this analysis to the observations and the experience gained in working in the organizations discussed, it allowed to indicate their specificity as a valuable tool for educating the young generation, supporting the basic environment of youth growth in fulfilling the

tasks given to them.

The outlined issues, the purpose and assumptions of this dissertation are presented in three chapters. The first one is historical and descriptive. It introduces Caritas School Circle as an example of church volunteering. Using the method of source criticism, a scientific reflection was carried out on the development of the idea of volunteering in a historical and social context. What is more, biblical inspirations, theological foundations and the main ideas of church teaching about Christian volunteering and charity service are presented. Later in this chapter, the Caritas School Circle are characterized, taking into account their origins, legal basis, as well as the essence and specificity of this form of charitable involvement of young people. This chapter also presents the elements that distinguish the volunteering of Caritas School Circle from many other forms of charity work available today. The conclusions from the first chapter of this dissertation confirm that the growing marginalization of Christian education today, both in public and school space, causes the Catholic Church to face the difficult task of arousing the interest and willingness of children and young people to participate in charity work. The analysis carried out in this part of the work has proven that the Caritas School Circle are a valuable tool for the Church in developing and shaping the world of young people's values. The presented characteristics of the goals of the CSC activities showed that in all the initiatives undertaken, the focus is always on a person who needs help, the weak, rejected and suffering. Volunteering developed in the Christian spirit is therefore a concern for the good of others and a tool for rebuilding the meaning of social service, effective help to one's neighbour, as well as the ethos of solidarity and responsibility for others. The analysis of the phenomenon of volunteering, carried out in the first part of this dissertation, allowed to prove that the assumptions of the Caritas School Circle very strongly include the aspect of education and development of young volunteers.

The second chapter of the work is devoted to the area of personal development of young people. Starting from showing the supporting function performed by Caritas School Circle in the process of education at the level of school, family and parish, the issues of discovering identity in adolescence, taking into account the specificity of adolescence, and then the impact of engaging in voluntary service on the emotional,

moral and religious development of adolescent students were shown. The content of the above chapter has been supplemented with a discussion of prevention methods that Caritas School Circle undertake in order to solve problems that hinder the formation of identity of young people. The analysis carried out in the second chapter of this work proved that Caritas School Circle undeniably play an important role in the personal development of a volunteer. First of all, it was pointed out that education through Caritas voluntary service bases on developing what is good in a person. Moreover, it has been proven that the integral upbringing of man preferred in CSC as the basis for achieving a mature personality indicates the way of formation, thanks to which the young person can understand who he is and what his values are. Owing to this fact, he becomes able to affirm himself and another person. The upbringing carried out in Caritas School Circle is therefore an aid in "uniting" a young person, in his maturation and in overcoming imperfections. Well-organized youth volunteering results in positive changes in the life of a volunteer. The benefits apply directly to the volunteer, they help improve his intrapsychic skills, and also contribute to broadening his awareness and serve the broadly understood self-development.

The content of the third and last chapter of this dissertation is the space of social development. Caritas School Circle are presented here as tools of socialization of young people, supporting social activity and influencing social interactions of adolescent volunteers. Due to the analysis carried out in this part of the work, the involvement of young people in the service of Caritas School Circle was presented as one of the most important ways of education to participate in social life. This was achieved by discussing development tasks that students have the opportunity to carry out through the work of a volunteer. An important element has also become the presentation of the basic principles of social education, thanks to which the Caritas School Circle become an appropriate tool for educating young people to social maturity. There is no doubt, therefore, that voluntary activity fosters building interpersonal relationships based on trust and cooperation, which contribute to social integration and ensure the comprehensive development of the community. The issue of relations in adolescence and the influence of the Caritas School Circle community on shaping interactions of adolescent youth is the subject of interest in the last part of this work. It has been noticed here that the

integrative role of volunteering manifests itself primarily in preventing the exclusion of individuals, which affects their relations with others. Close and deep ties are an important factor in striving for self-development of a young person and an indicator of his mental health. Volunteer work establishes, integrates and often renews interpersonal relations.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the issue discussed in this dissertation has not been fully exhausted, mainly due to its extensive scope. However, this work is an innovative attempt to show the educational possibilities of the Caritas School Circle. It is also an inspiration to undertake an in-depth study on this topic in the future, e.g. by means of implementing an empirical description of this phenomenon.

Summing up the content presented in this dissertation, it should be emphasized that each individual has certain needs. Among many of them there is also the need to develop, to become fully human, which concerns, for example, the spiritual, mental and social dimensions. Organizations of Caritas School Circle invite their pupils to activate many spheres of their life, and thus - to realize themselves as a human person. Thanks to this, they constitute a special form of education in the spirit of love of neighbour, supporting the comprehensive development of children and young people in the intellectual, psychological, social, aesthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions. The formation of children and youth within the Caritas School Circle in Poland brings invaluable educational benefits not only for the Church, but also for the entire society in which the Church is present, contributing to combating selfish and hedonistic attitudes. Caritas School Circle are becoming a place for adolescents where developmental changes are noticed. Moreover, by taking them into account, it is possible use their potential effectively and constructively, engaging young people in pro-social activities. As a result, adolescents develop their personality actively, shape their identity and integrate better into social structures, while learning to be responsible for changes taking place at different stages of life.

Keywords: volunteering, education, adolescence, Caritas School Circle.