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At the service of Christian families. Domestic Church circles in the Diocese of Gliwice (1982–2023)

W służbie chrześcijańskim rodzinom.
Kręgi Domowego Kościoła
na terenie diecezji gliwickiej (1982–2023)

Abstract:

In 2022, married couples belonging to the circles of the Domestic Church of the Light-Life Movement in the Gliwice diocese celebrated their 40th anniversary. During the commemorative celebrations, which, due to the pandemic, were only organised in autumn 2023 in five districts within the diocese, the members of the movement shared their experiences of the many years of evangelising activity, which they carried out with successes and failures during the difficult period of the Solidarity upsurge and the recovery of freedom, the post-industrial system changes and the time of increased emigration, and finally during the post-secularisation period, the time of the pandemic and the crisis of the Church in the most recent period. It was also noted that the community does not yet have a methodically compiled history, but only a chronicle, the record of which was kept up until 2007.

The aim of this paper is to present the history of Domowy Kościół (Domestic Church) groups in the Diocese of Gliwice, which have been presented in the pastoral space of local parishes since 1982. The scientific discourse, whose background will also be the presentation of the history of this secular association in the Church in Poland at present, will be supported by methods of analysis of historical sources and available scientific studies and pastoral aids. Since no attempt has been made so far to write any kind of synthesis of the history of the movement in the territory of the Gliwice diocese, the work is part of the current to save

from oblivion those events which animated the lay communities after the Second Vatican Council in the reality of political, cultural and social changes. The results obtained only confirm how poor the history of the local Church would be without the Domestic Church groups of the Light-Life Movement (Ruch Światło-Życie).

Keywords: Domestic Church of the Light-Life Movement, Diocese of Gliwice, Catholic associations, pastoral care for couples and families.

Abstrakt:

W 2022 r. małżeństwa, należące do kręgów Domowego Kościoła Ruchu Światło-Życie na terenie diecezji gliwickiej, przeżywały 40. rocznicę swojej działalności. W czasie okolicznościowych obchodów, jakie z powodu pandemii zorganizowano dopiero jesienią 2023 r. w pięciu okręgach na terenie diecezji, członkowie ruchu dzielili się doświadczeniami wieloletniej działalności ewangelizacyjnej, jaką z sukcesami i niepowodzeniami prowadzili w niełatwym okresie zrywu solidarnościowego i odzyskania wolności, postprzemysłowych przemian ustrojowych i czasu wzmożonej emigracji, a wreszcie w okresie postsekularyzacyjnym, czasie pandemii i kryzysu Kościoła w okresie najnowszym. Zauważono również, że wspólnota nie posiada jak dotąd opracowanych w sposób metodyczny swoich dziejów, a jedynie kronikę, której zapis doprowadzony został do 2007 r.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie dziejów grup Domowego Kościoła na terenie diecezji gliwickiej, które obecne są w przestrzeni duszpasterskiej tamtejszych parafii od 1982 r. Dyskurs naukowy, którego tłem będzie również przedstawienie dziejów tego obecnie stowarzyszenia świeckich w Kościele w Polsce, posiłkować się będzie metodami analizy źródeł historycznych oraz dostępnych opracowań naukowych i pomocy duszpasterskich. Ponieważ dotychczas nie pokuszono się o napisanie jakiegokolwiek syntezy dziejów ruchu na terenie diecezji gliwickiej, praca wpisuje się w nurt ocalenia od zapomnienia tych wydarzeń, które ożywiały wspólnoty świeckich po Soborze Watykańskim II w rzeczywistości przemian politycznych, kulturowych i społecznych, a uzyskane wyniki potwierdzają tylko, jak ubogie byłyby dzieje Kościoła lokalnego bez grup Domowego Kościoła Ruchu Światło-Życie.

Słowa kluczowe: Domowy Kościół Ruchu Światło-Życie, diecezja gliwicka, stowarzyszenia katolickie, duszpasterstwo małżeństw i rodzin.

In 2022, couples belonging to the Domowy Kościół (Domestic Church) in the Diocese of Gliwice – the family branch of the Light-Life Movement (Ruch Światło-Życie) – celebrated their 40th anniversary. Because of the pandemic that was going on at the time, the anniversary celebrations were postponed

until 2023 and were planned in the most modest way possible. The Servant of God Father Franciszek Blachnicki, founder of the *Domowy Kościół* (Domestic Church), speaking about the sacrament of marriage, pointed out that the visible sign here is the personal relationship between the two who enter into the marriage covenant, and their mutual love and union with the personal God is the path leading to their sanctification and ultimate union with the Creator of their love (Nowak and Nowak, 2024). This great pastor of the reform period of Vatican II, a liturgist and pastoralist, very accurately read the spirit of the conciliar renewal of the Church, inviting the lay faithful, including Christian married couples, to become actively involved in its royal, priestly and prophetic mission, which each Christian has been endowed with by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. After the initial successes in revitalising the liturgical ministry, then the resurrection of the abstinence work of the Crusade for Human Liberation (*Krucjata Wyzwolenia Człowieka*) and the foundation of the initially youthful Light-Life Movement, a very natural need arose to help Christian married couples. The Domestic Church of the Light-Life Movement, initiated in 1973, became a form of support for sacramental spouses, inviting them to participate more vividly in the life of the Church community. By creating the basis for future formation, a key emphasis was placed on sanctifying the spouses in their sacrament of love. The Domestic Church helped them to draw on the grace and power of the sacrament of marriage, teaching them how to live this sacrament and how to celebrate it throughout their lives. The charisms present in this Oasis movement was enriched by elements developed over the years in the thriving international Catholic marriage movement *Équipes Notre-Dame*, from which the Domestic Church took over the ideal of marital spirituality, i.e. striving towards God in union with one's spouse.

After a brief presentation of the assumptions and ideas of this post-conciliar pro-family movement, the activity of marriage circles in our diocese will be presented, which have been presented in the pastoral space of the diocese and their parishes since 1982. Interestingly, these groups have rarely kept chronicles or documented their activities in the form of produced documentation. This text seeks to save from oblivion the beginnings of the activities of *Domowy Kościół* (Domestic Church) groups in the Diocese of Gliwice. Where there was a lack of documents in the history of the movement, it was based on the testimonies obtained from the first generation of spouses who formed the basis of the movement, within the framework of the increasingly popular oral history method.

1. Foundations and aims of the Domestic Church

The formation programme of the Domestic Church, which has been developed over the years, has been shaped on the basis of the teaching of the Church, in particular on the basis of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the formation principles of the Light-Life Movement and Équipes Notre-Dame¹. The foundation of this programme is a conjugal spirituality, realised through the adoption of formative elements called commitments – gifts that have been adopted directly from Équipes Notre-Dame. These include daily personal prayer combined with the reading of the Bible, regular encounters with the Word of God, daily marital prayer as standing together before the Lord, and daily prayer of the family as a community immersed in God (Ruch Światło-Życie, 2013, pp. 8–10). The basis for building a fruitful marital relationship is communication, realised in the so-called marital dialogue, which the spouses experience together once a month (Skiba, 2006, p. 161; Grzybowski, 2009, pp. 11–27). The Rule of Life, as a fruit resulting directly from the marital dialogue, is materialised in the systematic work on oneself, one's marriage and family. These commitments are not an end in themselves, but a means for each spouse to draw closer to God and to grow on the path of marital spirituality towards holiness.

Sacramental couples are grouped in so-called circles (in France referred to as *équipe*) with an average of 4 to 7 couples. Each group participates in monthly formation meetings of the circle and at least once a year in a formation recollection. The meetings and retreats are intended to help the spouses in their pursuit of Christ and in fulfilling their commitments (the idea of the small group as a necessary environment for faith growth). The monthly meetings, lasting about three hours, are filled with prayer, sharing of life and formation (Ruch Światło-Życie, 2013, p. 11; Stowarzyszenie “Diakonia Domowego Kościoła Ruchu Światło-Życie”, 2009, pp. 7–13, 2012, pp. 3–5). Each circle has an animator couple, i.e. a leader couple (elected each year to time by the couples themselves), and a priest – the spiritual mentor of the circle, but not its leader, maintaining the principle that the community is an association of lay faithful. Circles come together and meet several times a year in communities at the district and diocesan level, and the whole activity of the Domestic Church is coordinated at the branch level or at the national level, as it is the case in Poland (Ruch Światło-Życie, 2013, pp. 16–23).

¹ Équipes Notre-Dame (The Groups of Our Lady) – one of the world's largest movements of marital spirituality aimed at helping married couples to move towards holiness. This Roman Catholic lay organisation, founded in France in 1938 by the Servant of God Fr. Henri Caffarel (1903–1996) and reactivated after the war in 1947, was approved by the Holy See in 1992. It has been actively involved in the work of the Church for many years, collaborating with the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Formation itself is carried out in three stages, according to a programme shaped on the basis of a liturgical book approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults*. After an initial stage of pilots (introducing the new circle to the charism of the community), the main emphasis in the first year of formation is on re-evangelisation (Blachnicki, 2013, pp. 68–70). At the retreats, in addition to the formation topics common to the entire movement of the World-Life Movement, additional issues are addressed: managing fertility, living the faith in the family, raising children for love, service and community, Christian asceticism and marital dialogue (Sepioło, 2023, p. 20). It is also at this stage that it is proposed that the spouses undertake the function of the family catechumenate (Blachnicki, 2012, p. 3).

In the next formation year, the Domestic Church is implementing the content of the *Ten Steps to Christian Maturity* (*Dziesięć kroków ku dojrzałości chrześcijańskiej*). As far as the basic content is concerned, they do not differ from those proposed in youth communities (Jesus Christ, Immaculate, Holy Spirit, Church, Word of God, Prayer, Liturgy, Testimony, New Culture, *Agape*). Some of the Steps have been expanded and contain much more content than is usual for youth groups. In the fourth and fifth year of formation, themes are developed: The Way to Community and The School of Christ, proposing to the spouses to take on the duty of being an animation couple (after having experienced a retreat and having undergone formation beforehand), as well as encouraging them to become actively involved in the life of the Church at parish and diocesan level, fulfilling various ministries (διακονία) (Ruch Światło-Życie, 2013, pp. 12–15; Sepioło, 2023, p. 73). Formation has been designed in such a way that the proposed themes return periodically as the content of the monthly meetings, laying the foundations for continuing formation. Thus, they do not exhaust their content, but return every few years to strengthen the spouses on the path of close friendship with Christ in His Church. In order to facilitate contact with the national headquarters of the Living Church Movement (Centrala Ruchu Żywego Kościoła) and to standardise formation, in 1975 Fr. Francis Blachnicki began publishing a quarterly magazine: “Domowy Kościół. List do wspólnot rodzinnych” (The Domestic Church. Letter to Family Communities). The first handouts, which Fr. Blachnicki published as 26 issues of the “Letter” between 1975 and 1981, were reissued in 2003. They constitute the core of the most important contents dealt with in the monthly meetings of the circle (Światło-Życie, 2003, p. 5; Wodarczyk, 2008, p. 374), which also include proposals for common formation meetings on anniversaries or special events experienced in the Church, commenting on the “signs of the times” present in the contemporary world (Laskowski, 1985, pp. 11–

27, 297–311). The coordination of activities for the fellowship of communities is overseen by the Ministry of Unity (Diakonia Jedności), which has been specially set up for this purpose.

Within the work of the Circles of the Domestic Church, the spirituality of the family community is clearly defined, and its three main characteristics are articulated: personalism, respect for fertility and life, and *agape* love. As a legacy of the fact that the Domestic Church is part of the large Light-Life Movement, the liturgical-family school is also presented in its formation. With a reduced number of liturgical themes, the emphasis here is more on the experience of the liturgy by the spouses and Christian families and its fruits, if only in the form of responsible parenthood (Kozyra *et al.*, 2015, pp. 25–26). It can be said that the Domestic Church, by combining the liturgical school with the family school, has given rise to a greater articulation of issues concerning the duties arising from status and appointment (Sepiolo, 2023, p. 39).

Married couples belonging to the Domestic Church are called to the service of their own family, understood as building up a community of faith, hope and love, in which the awareness is present that all its members are children of the one God and thus possess their uniqueness and dignity, regardless of their age and stage of development. This awareness leads to a generous attitude of service to the family and its individual members, and to accepting the gift of service from others. The family community becomes a great opportunity for man's all-round development – his growth in God, his knowledge of the truth about himself and his learning to love (Tomkiewicz, 2010, pp. 124–126).

2. The Domestic Church of the Light-Life Movement in Poland – its origins and current state

The founder of the Light-Life Movement, Father Franciszek Blachnicki (1921–1987), reading the 'signs of the times', began the work of the Oases of the Living Church on Polish soil by organising a fifteen-day oasis retreat for altar boys in 1954. As a pastor, he very quickly noticed that it was precisely this kind of experiential form, and not just giving the truths of the faith in a catechetical way, that was appreciated by the participants of the oasis and bore much more fruit. Further on, Fr. Blachnicki went on to set up the Abstinence Crusade (1957–1960), which was essentially a continuation of the Church's abstinence work initiated in Silesia in the mid-19th century by Fr. Alojzy Ficek (1790–1852). After a short interruption, due to the liquidation of the centre by the National Security Service (a unit designed to combat all manifestations of anti-communist activity against

the Communist state) in 1961, Fr. Blachnicki developed a whole system of formation and evangelisation, including children and young people (the Oasis of the Children of God and the Oasis of the New Church, transformed into the Living Church Movement). This work bore tangible fruit, and the men's and women's youth groups very quickly gave rise to communities of academic and working young people. The Living Church Movement thus formed was entrusted to Mary Immaculate, Mother of the Church, on 11 June 1973 in Krościenko on the Dunajec river by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. In 1976, the Living Church Movement took the name Light-Life Movement (*Ruch Światło-Życie*).

Working with children and young people made the leaders of the Oasis aware of the urgent need to renew the family environment. Father Blachnicki saw a fading need for Christian catechumenate in families, whose task was to introduce their baptised children to the mystery of faith and sacramental life in the community of the Church (Blachnicki, 2002, pp. 78–86). It was also possible to see not only the parents' lack of capacity to pass on the faith, but also the crisis of marriages themselves in the clash with the communists' promotion of social attitudes in an atheistic spirit. As early as the 1960s, Fr. Blachnicki came to the conclusion that a deep and systematic renewal of the Christian life of contemporary Catholics could be achieved above all by renewing the religious life of Catholic families (Wodarczyk, 2008, p. 368). From 1968 onwards, the idea of the family movement, the foundations of which he based on the principles developed by the French *Équipes Notre-Dame* movement and which he assimilated during his trip to Paris in 1972, became increasingly alive in his mind. Fr. Blachnicki felt that the time was right to organise a special retreat for families alongside the Oasis of Church Life for children, young people, priests², nuns and lay educators who were also on retreat with their pupils. The first camp, organised in 1973 in Krościenko on the Dunajec river, was attended by 51 families and a total of 154 people from 10 dioceses. In October of the same year, the first family circles of the Living Church Movement began their formation work, made up of five to seven married couples, which later came to be known as Domestic Church circles (*Domowy Kościół*). By all accounts, the most vibrant communities were active in Lublin and involved the staff of the local Catholic University, where Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki and Fr. Wojciech Danielski (1935–1985) were professors. In 1974, Fr. Blachnicki invited Sr Jadwiga Skudro RSCJ (1914–2009) to collaborate in the creation of the foundations of the movement and commissioned her to translate and rewrite the formation texts used by the *Équipes Notre-Dame* movement for

² From the beginning, the priests of the movement, gathered by Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki around the ideal of Christ the Servant, in time formed the Association "Union of Priests of Christ the Servant" (*Unia Kapłanów Chrystusa Sługi*).

almost 30 years. The first fruits in the form of worked out conscripts were discussed and approved during the historic meeting at Jasna Góra in 1975, which besides Sr Jadwiga and Fr. Blachnicki was attended by Bishop Kazimierz Majdański – the then vice-chairman of the Episcopal Commission for Families, Hanna Świącicka – writer and pedagogue, sociologist Franciszek Adamski and other guests invited especially for the occasion (Strużanowska, Strużanowski and Talaga, 2015, pp. 8–9).

In each circle, alongside the spouses, a priest participated, who acted as spiritual director but not as circle leader, which was the responsibility of the animation couple. The movement of Catholic couples and their families was rapidly gaining strength. In 1974, 96 families went on a summer retreat, a year later 157 families, and in 1978 1,700 people from 303 families took part in a summer retreat (Wodarczyk, 2008, p. 369). Looking at the development of the Domestic Church, Fr. Blachnicki believed that it was “the strongest branch of the Living Church Movement, forming an integral part of it” (Wodarczyk, 2008, p. 377). After 1981 (i.e. while the founder of the movement was in exile), there were minor or major tensions between the Domestic Church and the rest of the movement over the importance of the formative elements. This is evident even in the used materials of the period. In the 1987 brochure on the Domestic Church, there is not a word about the *Ten Steps to Baptist Maturity* (Diakonia Domowego Kościoła, 1987), the formative foundation of the Light-Life Movement. At that time, the promoters of the Domestic Church based on the ideas of Équipes Notre-Dame did not adopt the catechumenal option, but pursued a consistently catechetical rather than evangelistic path, emphasising teaching and commitment rather than the initiation and experience so important in the then developing Oasis movement. The leaders of the circles emphasised such implementation of the marital ideal, putting “commitments” before “steps towards maturity”. The situation changed after the re-edition of the formation materials, i.e. after 2004 and after the introduction of the *Ten Steps* in the second year of the formation of the Domestic Church (Centralna Diakonia Domowego Kościoła, 2007; Sepioło, 2023, p. 125).

The family communities – within the Light-Life Movement – enriched from the outset by the spirituality of the Équipes Notre-Dame international movement of Catholic couples, adopted in 1978 initially the name “Ruch Domowy Kościół” (Domestic Church Movement) and later “Domowy Kościół” (Domestic Church). The mark of the Domestic Church is two Greek words: ΦΩΣ (light) and ΖΩΗ (life), inscribed in the shape of a cross, rising from between two joined rings, placed together with the cross in a stylised figure of a house. The Domestic Church also uses the Équipes Notre-Dame sign, an icon of the Holy Family, in reference to its

patronal feast day, Holy Family Sunday (Strużanowska, Strużanowski and Talaga, 2015, p. 3). On 15 March 2006, the Polish Episcopal Conference approved the Rules of the Domestic Church (*Zasady Domowego Kościoła*), approving its activities as an association of lay faithful, and on 12 June 2014 it agreed to a slight revision of the movement's statutes, which was dictated mainly by new guidelines for the election of responsible couples and moderators at the various levels (Ruch Światło-Życie, 2015, pp. 3, 23). In 2014, the movement counted 16,000 married couples gathered in 3,600 circles. Outside Poland, circles are growing in Ukraine, Slovakia, Belarus, Canada, the United States, the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden and France (Strużanowska, Strużanowski and Talaga, 2015, p. 3).

3. The beginnings of the Domestic Church in today's Diocese of Gliwice (1982–1998)

The history of the Domestic Church in the Gliwice area dates back to 1982. 11 years earlier, Fr. Ryszard Salańczyk³ – then parish priest of the Holy Spirit Parish in Gliwice-Ostropa – offered his animators a trip to an oasis retreat in Krościenko to get acquainted with the oasis charism. Each participant took part in a separate Oasis retreat: the young people in the Oasis of the Living Church and Fr. Salańczyk in a closed retreat for priests. After 13 days, everyone met for a day of fellowship together. When asked by the priest what they thought of this form of living the faith together, almost everyone exclaimed: “Father, this is it!” (Salańczyk and Górecki, 2007, p. 191). In the autumn of that year, oasis meetings were started in the parish among altar boys, children of Mary and young people studying and working, and in the summer of 1972 the first summer oasis for young people took place, which was organised at the Verbites in Nysa. In 1975, Fr. Salańczyk, at the express request of Fr. Blachnicki, took charge of groups in the Gliwice district whose pastoral workers wanted to form children and young people in a similar way (Górecki, 2011, pp. 197–198). Much to the pastor's dismay, more and more young people went on Oasis retreats each year, but on their return, they had to contend with the reluctance of their parents, who sometimes reproached their children directly in the words: “You are not going to make

³ Fr. Ryszard Salańczyk (1927–2007) – a priest of the Diocese of Opole, and since 1992 of the Diocese of Gliwice. He came from Żelazna near Opole and was ordained priest in 1956. As a curate he served in the parish of Christ the King in Gliwice, and in 1961 he became pastor of the parish of the Holy Spirit in Gliwice-Ostropa. He held this position until his retirement in 2000. At the request of his parishioners, he remained in Ostropa, serving as “the oldest vicar in the Diocese of Gliwice”. He died there in 2007 (Górecki, 2011).

a church out of my house here”! (Górecki, 2011, p. 95). This gave rise to the need to involve also adults in the Oasis movement, but the parish priest succeeded in encouraging couples only from outside his parish to join the first circle. (Kalnik and Kalnik, 2024). The first couple chosen by Fr. Salańczyk, Helena and Wiesław Świdorski, came from the parish of St Apostles Peter and Paul in Gliwice. Since they were the first married couple to lead a circle in the then Diocese of Opole since 1982, they began to be called a diocesan couple, even though the first two circles operated exclusively in Gliwice that year (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, p. 1–2). In 1984, Father Salańczyk once again led a summer oasis for young people at the home of the Królczyks in Ochotnica Górna, inviting married couples for the first time, for whom he organised separate formation meetings. Because of the spartan conditions there, it was decided that the oases held since 1975 in Ochotnica Górna would henceforth be organised in the Ursuline nuns’ convent in Głuchołazy (later “Skowronek”, and now the diocesan Vincenz Priessnitz Formation, Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre) (Salańczyk and Górecki, 2007, p. 198; Górecki, 2011, pp. 93–94). In 1986 and 1987 further summer oases were organised not only in Głuchołazy, but also in Sieniawa. The latter were organised exclusively for married couples and their families, while young people were offered other trips as part of separate youth oases organised by the diocese (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, pp. 2–3). As the number of marriages and circles grew, Fr. Salańczyk offered to look after some of them to Fr. Stanisław Rabiej, who was ordained in 1984⁴.

In 1987 Helena and Wiesław Świdorski emigrated to the United States and finally settled in Chicago, where they also became involved in the activities of the Domestic Church. The Gliwice group was taken over by Róża and Władysław Panicz, who organised the next retreat for Domestic Church circles in 1988 with Fr. Salańczyk in Wesola. It was then a fruitful time of growth for married couples and the founding of new circles. Apart from the Gliwice region, circles were created in Zabrze (the first two circles founded in 1984 by Fr. Oskar Pauszkiewicz OFM), Bytom, Prudnik and Opole, and by 1989 there were about 40 circles (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, p. 4). According to the suggestion of Fr. Salańczyk, the organisation of summer retreats at the Ursuline nuns in Głuchołazy was resumed, and it was also possible to go on other retreats within the framework of particular years of formation work, which were organised by other dioceses. When the

⁴ Fr. Stanisław Rabiej (born 1959 in Zabrze) – priest of the Opole diocese, ordained in 1984, currently professor of theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Opole, specialising in systematic theology, theological anthropology, ecumenism and sociology of religion.

Diocese of Gliwice was created in 1992, the circles in Opole and Prudnik were excluded from the area of the former Diocese of Opole, and the Bytom and Gliwice circuits invited the marriage circles that had been active since the late 1980s in the area of Tarnowskie Góry. The time of Róża and Władysław Panicz's ministry as diocesan couple lasted until September 1996. It was a very vibrant time of building and expanding the community. In addition to the summer Oasis periods and the Oasis of Family Animators Retreats (ORARs) organised during the year, a monthly animator school was run. The animation couples were hosted by the St Anthony parish in Gliwice, where Catholic Radio "Puls" (later Radio "Plus") had been successfully operating since 1993. Formation materials were used as textbooks by professors teaching, among others, at the Higher Theological Seminary in Nysa, and later in Opole, where the University of Opole with its Faculty of Theology was founded in 1994. In this way, the animators studied together, for example, the entire ethics course of Prof. Alojzy Marcol or the famous *Decalogue* by Prof. Edward Stanek from Krakow. During this formation, also a Seminar on Marriage Renewal in the Holy Spirit was conducted, based on Light-Life Movement materials and adapted to marital spirituality, written by Fr. Jan Mikrut CSSR⁵. There was also a lively collaboration with the family pastoral care agency set up at the diocesan curia in Gliwice, especially with Maria Gruszczyńska, who was responsible for running premarital courses and family counselling centres in the diocese. Many of the women in the marriage circles then completed family counselling courses and took up work in parishes around the diocese (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, pp. 7–11; Wizental and Wizental, 2023). There was a thriving animators' school, whose meetings took place in the convent of the Borromeo nuns in Zabrze-Biskupice (now the Gliwice Diocese Retreat Centre).

Despite so many initiatives, the number of members of the Domestic Church still remained at the same level and did not exceed 40 circles grouped in four regions: Gliwice (district couple Ewa and Sławomir Siwik), Bytom (district couple Barbara and Edward Wojtała), Zabrze (emerged in 1990 from the Gliwice region, district couple Anna and Zbigniew Zieliński), Tarnogórski (district couple Urszula and Jan Murek) and Lubliniec, which was founded at the end of 1999 after one circle was separated there from the former Tarnowskie Góry region

⁵ Fr. Jan Mikrut CSSR (1942–2013) – Redemptorist, youth pastor, catechist, retreatist, co-founder and for many years employee of Radio Maryja. Until 1991, he served at the Redemptorist monastery in Gliwice, actively supporting the Oasis movement in the so-called Gliwice pastoral region, i.e. a part of the then Gliwice diocese comprising the largest cities of the Opole diocese: Gliwice, Zabrze and Bytom. In 1992, they became a separate Gliwice diocese with the attached deaneries from the former Katowice diocese: Tarnowskie Góry, Lubliniec, Sadów, Woźniki and Żyglin.

(Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, p. 12; Wizental and Wizental, 2023).

4. Successes and failures, ups and downs (1999–2010)

The 1990s were characterised by an increased movement of association, which the shepherds of Polish dioceses wanted to give the right direction to, and above all, tried to involve in the work of the Church. This was also the case for the Diocese of Gliwice. In 1998, the director of the Pastoral Department at the Diocesan Curia in Gliwice – Fr. Paweł Pyrchala – sent Fr. Salańczyk a proposal that all circles of the Domestic Church in the diocese should join the Association of Catholic Families (*Stowarzyszenie Rodzin Katolickich*), founded in 1993, which received its statute and the character of a diocesan organisation from Bishop Jan Wiczorek on 2 February 1994 (Górecki, 2022, pp. 17, 24). When the dedication ceremony of the Association of Catholic Families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus took place in Gliwice Cathedral on 13 June 1997, the pastor of Ostropa was once again asked to influence his spouses to become actively involved in this evangelising work. Fr. Salańczyk did not want to aggregate the circles into an association, rightly fearing a dilution of the oasis ideas (Kalnik and Kalnik, 2024).

The tensions that took place at that time necessarily led to Fr. Salańczyk being dismissed from the post of moderator by Bishop Wiczorek. He was then replaced by Fr. Konrad Lempa⁶, in a way initiating the tenure of office of the moderator, who had always been approved by the Bishop, if not elected (Archive of the Diocesan Curia in Gliwice, 1992, sec. H 43). As the Statute of the Domestic Church was not yet in force, such moves did not please everyone (Wizental and Wizental, 2023). The actions of the Gliwice bishop were justified to a certain extent by the fact that this was also a rather difficult period for the Oasis community itself, as there were constant disputes about defining its own identity. Throughout Poland, the Domestic Church was divided. Some regarded the Domestic Church as a branch of the Light-Life Movement, while others demanded complete autonomy. In the Diocese of Gliwice, a meeting was held in Bytom with Sister Jadwiga Skudro, who passed on Father Blachnicki's principles to the spouses and asked them to remain united in the Oasis movement (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, p. 12). The identity of the

⁶ Fr. Konrad Lempa (born 1959 in Kolonowskie) – priest of the Diocese of Katowice and since 1992 of the Diocese of Gliwice, ordained in 1986, since 2000 parish priest of Our Lady of Sorrows in Boruszowice and builder of their church building.

community was saved, but the effect of these disputes was to temporarily halt its development. A great help for the spouses was Sr. Jadwiga's leading of retreats (for two years in a row), which sister entitled: *New Evangelisation and the Domestic Church* and *The Ministry of the Domestic Church Circle Animator*. In 1999, Krystyna and Andrzej Fajge were elected as the couple in charge of Domestic Church circles in the diocese, a post they held until 2002. Circles in the diocese had shrunk to 30 families, but nevertheless its agencies were active. The work of the Human Liberation Crusade was led by Zofia and Jan Wieczorek, organising alcohol-free New Year's Eve and carnival parties in almost all areas and making pilgrimages to Niepokalanów every year. The ministry of the Diakonia of the Word was led with great dedication first by Stefan and Irena Zeifert and then by Helena and Wiesław Goc. Ewa and Andrzej Majgier were the district couple in Gliwice, followed by Ilona and Mariusz Nowiński, who at the same time piloted the work of the circles in Lubliniec and Rudy Raciborskie (finally the circle there was incorporated back into Gliwice). For summer retreats, couples went to various oasis centres throughout the country (including Tenczyn, Kowary and Koniaków) (Kalnik and Kalnik, 2024). Fr. Konrad Lempa, in order to warm up the image of the Domestic Church in the diocese, proposed trips each year to the retreat house in Mochów near Głogówek, which Fr. Pyrczała had established as a retreat centre for the Association of Catholic Families of the Diocese of Gliwice. On the radio station 'Puls', the spouses, together with the moderator, hosted half-hour programmes from time to time, bearing witness to the value of the commitments made by members of the Domestic Church. Many experiences were given to families by the joint meeting with the Holy Father John Paul II in Gliwice (17 June 1999), when the spouses of the Domestic Church made a special gift to the Pope: *The Commitment to deepen marital spirituality*. In September 2000, a joint jubilee pilgrimage to Rome was organised (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, pp. 20–22). ORARs retreats, dedicated to marital spirituality and also to prayer in the family, were organised throughout the diocese.

The following years saw the growth of the community to almost 50 circles. In 2002, the ministry of the diocesan couple was taken over by Regina and Piotr Olszówka, and in 2005, Fr. Arkadiusz Kinel was elected as diocesan moderator⁷. From the beginning of their ministry they were very actively involved in the work of editing the rules of the Domestic Church (2002–2005). These activities were carried out in such a way that the turmoil that was then

⁷ Fr. Arkadiusz Kinel (born in 1967 in Tarnowskie Góry) – priest of the Gliwice diocese, ordained in 1992, since 2005 pastor of St Andrew's parish in Zabrze, and since 2021 dean of the Zabrze deanery.

affecting the community in various dioceses in the country would “bypass” the Diocese of Gliwice (Wizental and Wizental, 2023). In their ministry, Regina and Piotr set their sights on building unity in the diocese in the broadest sense. The Unity Diakonia was then formed. An important part of this was the strong promotion of the so-called Oases of Prayer. They were held according to the conscripts proposed by the national headquarters of the Light-Life Movement; each year in a different region. Fr. Sylwester Witoszek SJ, from the parish of Our Lady of Kochawina in Gliwice, has shown a lot of heart to the Domestic Church communities, where workshops on marital spirituality have been organised by the local Centre for Training and Dialogue “Theotokos” (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, pp. 27–29). Once a month, special prayer and formation meetings were organised for all the circles in the diocese, to which the moderators of the respective regions and Fr. Jan Mikulski (then national moderator) together with Anna and Jacek Nowak (then national couple) were invited. Since it was not convenient for all the spouses to travel to Gliwice, it was decided that such meetings would be organised cyclically in the following areas: Gliwice (Our Lady of Kochawina parish, 2003–2004), Bytom (St Anne’s parish, 2005–2006), Tarnowskie Góry (St. Apostles Peter and Paul parish, 2006–2007) and Zabrze (St. Anne’s parish, 2006–2007) (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, p. 33). It became a rule to sing carols together every year with Bishop Jan Wieczorek. Since 2006, the members of the community have made annual pilgrimages to the Sanctuary of St. Joseph in Kalisz for the National Pilgrimage of the Domestic Church, as well as to the diocesan sanctuary of Our Lady of Humility in Rudy for the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage of Families (Archive of the House Church of the Diocese of Gliwice, 1982, pp. 35–36).

5. Instead of a conclusion: New calls in an era of widespread secularisation

The recent history of Domestic Church circles in the Diocese of Gliwice is a time of piloting new circles, which cannot always survive in the first few years of formation. The great impact of the secularisation and de-Christianisation of Polish society is discernible, affecting Christian families very strongly. If the trend of emigration “for bread” by young members of the Domestic Church (leaving for Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) has been halted in recent years, the last few years have been a time of the passing away to eternity of the first generation that formed the Domestic Church. The work of approving the statutes of the community and the principles that

guide it on a daily basis (in 2006) was successfully brought to a conclusion. The Domestic Church of the Light-Life Movement in the Diocese of Gliwice is still an integral part of the large Oasis movement. In order that its activities may also have the characteristics of a public benefit organisation, on 16 October 2020, the Bishop of Gliwice, Jan Kopiec, established the public association of the faithful “Diakonia of the Light-Life Movement” and approved its statutes (Górecki, 2022, p. 69). For years, the couple have been actively involved in diocesan and evangelisation works, as requested by the Gliwice bishops. It is out of this community that the initiative to establish Catholic schools in Zabrze-Mikulczyce and Lubliniec (in 1997 and 2000) arose, although, of course, they are run within the framework of the activities of specially established associations (Górecki, 2022, pp. 23, 31, 39). Members of the Domestic Church are involved in the activities of the Council of Movements of the Diocese of Gliwice, bringing together all religious associations and the diocesan referents and leaders of individual parish and diocesan groups. In this way, what the Bishops of Gliwice have been calling for since 1993 has been achieved, and at the same time all the elements of the movement’s charism have been preserved, building the unity of the diocesan community in the multiplicity of its groups and associations (Wizental and Wizental, 2023). In the post-pandemic situation and in the face of the revealed sins of some Church people, it is hoped that the work of the Domestic Church, which began in Gliwice in 1982, will not be lost. Successive diocesan couples and moderators, who are by no means lacking in evangelical zeal, are striving for this. In this work, however, they forgot to document the works carried out by their members, because the chronicle of the community ends in 2007.

In 2023, there were 66 circles functioning in the Gliwice diocese, grouped in five regions: Bytom, Gliwice, Zabrze, Tarnowskie Góry and Lubliniec. There were 9 circles each in the Bytom, Zabrze and Gliwice regions, 32 circles in the Tarnowskie Góry region and 7 circles in the Lubliniec region. In total, almost 310 married couples from the diocese belong to the Domestic Church Movement, i.e. almost 620 adults and their children (Dębska and Dębski, 2023). The duties of diocesan couple are held by Barbara and Witold Marek, and the function of diocesan moderator from 2020 is held by Fr. Marek Olekszyk⁸.

⁸ Fr. Marek Olekszyk (born in 1971 in Bobrowniki Śląskie) – priest of the Diocese of Gliwice, ordained in 1998, since 2018 pastor of St Anne’s parish in Babice.

Table 1. Diocesan couples of the Domestic Church in the Diocese of Gliwice

No.	Names of the leading couple	Years of ministry
1	Helena i Wiesław Świdorski	1982–1986 (Diocese of Opole)
2	Róża i Władysław Panicz	1986–1992 (Diocese of Opole) 1992–1996 (Diocese of Gliwice)
3	Celina i Jerzy Tomala	1996–1999
4	Krystyna i Andrzej Fajge	1999–2002
5	Regina i Piotr Olszówka	2002–2007
7	Ewa i Andrzej Majgier	2007–2010
8	Aleksandra i Dariusz Józwik	2010–2013
9	Adrianna i Grzegorz Machoń	2013–2017
10	Katarzyna i Janusz Kułacz	2017–2020
11	Ilona i Mariusz Nowiński	2020–2023
12	Barbara i Witold Marek	2023–

Table 2. Diocesan Moderators of the Domestic Church in the Diocese of Gliwice

No.	Names of the priest	Years of ministry
1	Fr. Ryszard Salańczyk	1982–1992 (Diocese of Opole) 1992–1998 (Diocese of Gliwice)
2	Fr. Konrad Lempa	1998–2005
3	Fr. Arkadiusz Kinel	2005–2010
4	Fr. Michał Wilner	2010–2014
5	Fr. Jarosław Buchenfeld	2014–2020
7	Fr. Marek Olekszyk	2020–

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