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The Community of Benedictine Oblates at St. Peter and Paul Abbey in Tyniec, Poland
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The canonical status of the Oblates was laid down by the Pope Leon XIII in 1898. The first historically known “Statutes and Rules for the Oblates” for all Benedictine monasteries was endorsed by St Pope Pius X in 1904, following the request by the then Primate Abot Father Hildebrand de Hemptine. It meant that the Benedictine oblates status was being sorted out and organized concurrently with the revival of the Benedictine monastic life.

But already decades earlier, in September 1816, Francis I, the Emperor of Austria ordered the liquidation of the Tyniec monastery. As a result, there was hardly place there for the monks, to say nothing of the lay oblates striving to realize their spirituality grounded in the St Benedict Rule, with affiliation to the Tyniec monastery. It became possible only after Father Karol von Oost succeeded in his efforts to have the monks return to the Tyniec Abbey shortly before the II World War.

Father von Oost had been staying in Poland since the late twenties of the last century, intending to revive the Benedictine order in our country. His mission ended victorious and in the thirties the Belgian Abbey of St Andrew in Zevenkerken became the centre for the vocational formation of the future Polish Benedictine monks. Father Karol found many friends among the Polish laity, people who wanted to direct their lives based on the St Benedict Rule. Even before the Polish monks returned to Poland, some of them started a Polish oblates community affiliated to the St Andrew Abbey in Belgium. The oblates were helping Father Karol in his efforts to reactivate the Benedictine order in Poland.

The solemn ceremonial of instating eleven monks at the Tyniec monastery took place on the 30th July 1939. Father Karol can Oost became a prior. Only after the monks had been reintroduced to the abbey was it possible to organize the Tyniec oblates community. The first vows taken by the oblates date to the period of the II World War and immediately after its cessation. We can find among them the names of: Anna and Jerzy Turowicz (1940), priest Bohdan Niemerewski (1942), Andrzej Turowicz (later Father Bernard - 1943), Wiesława Rymarówna (1947), Janina and Przemysław Mroczkowsy (1948), Olga Bałucińska (1948), Aldona Szymkiewiczówna (1948), Father Leon Knabit (1953), bl. Hanna Chrzanowska (1956).

Under the German occupation the monthly day-long meetings for formation purposes and common prayer were organized in Warsaw as early as 1941. The oblates met for the first time “officially” in Tyniec on 20th May 1944. Father van Oost was appointed the first director

of the community, who decided that there were enough oblates to organize regular meetings. They began with the Matins, then they recited Holy Mass and after communal breakfast – teachings. The afternoons were dedicated to reading of a chapter of the St Benedict Rule followed by a short commentary. The next point on the agenda was a conference or a talk with accompanying discussion. The meetings were concluded with the oblates reciting together the Compline.

Such retreats or formation days were continued after the War. In that time Tyniec was a village without electricity or plumbing, twelve kilometers from Kraków with no public transport. The oblates traveled by bike or on foot to commemorate the St Benedict's Day or the Triduum. The liturgical texts (in Latin and the Polish translation) were copied by hand. There were periodical meetings of the oblates in Kraków, often at the nuns or in private homes. The programme entailed the Holy Mass, breakfasting together while discussing things and in the afternoon – liturgy accompanied by teachings. At every meeting the oblates renewed the promise made during the Act of Oblation. The meetings were initially led by Father von Oost, who was staying in Tyniec until 1951. After him the care of the oblates was taken over by Father Piotr Rostworowski, Father Jan Wierusz Kolwalski, Father Placyd Gliński, occasionally Father Paweł Szczaniecki and Father Bernard Turowicz.

The meetings were organized with the degree of secrecy, still, they did not escape the notice of the security police. The communist regime deemed the meetings illegal and exercised strict monitoring. At one point, the authorities, in their fight with the catholic organizations whose existence dated from before the war, demanded their renewed official registration. According to the decree from the 5th August 1949 "*re change of some regulations of the law concerning associations*" all religious societies and organizations were dissolved if they did not fulfilled the requirement of the new rule within 90 days of its introduction. As per the decree, the Tyniec Oblates community was also ruled illegal. For that reason they were organized outside Tyniec, mostly in Kraków, in the house of the Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Charity at Pędzichów, at the house of the Franciscan sisters on Smoleńsk street and in the private apartment of Anna and Jerzy Turowicz and Helena Lisowska.

Soon the agents of the "Bezpieka" – the security police – focused their attention on these meetings as well. In May 1955 the meeting was scheduled at Helena Lisowska's place – but the agents arrived before its time and accused Lisowska of organizing illegal meetings. As a result the meetings were suspended for the rest of 1955 – or, to be precise, they were continued "in the underground". In the second half of 1955 the Oblates were meeting in Tyniec only occasionally for the daylong formation. They also did not have their dedicated director – the

meetings were led most often by Father Piotr Rostworowski, Father Jak Wierusz-Kowalski, Father Placyd Galiński, occasionally Father Paweł Sczaniecki and Father Bernard Turowicz. This uncertain state lasted until the end of the seventies of the last century.

The Second Vatican Council, which initiated a renewal in the life of the Catholic Church, helped also the Oblates to find their place in the current reality of the Church. Among others, it is worthwhile to mention the initiative of a congress of Italian Oblates in Assisi in September 1971. Numerous discussions and wide consultations initiated during this occasion led to the appearance of the statutes which were eventually accepted by the Holy See and recommended for the Italian Oblates in 1975. Father Leon Knabit recollects those times: in spite of this, *“Father Abbot Placyd said to wait because it is not known in which direction one can and should develop the oblates’ activities. Let’s put things on hold – he said. I was nominated the oblates’ director, but like a chaplain in the Polish People’s Army, who gets the salary exactly for not doing – God forbid! – what he should be doing. So I was also not doing anything for some time and only because one kept pushing the higher instances things were finally set into motion”*.

At the turn of the seventies and eighties of the past century, the then abbot of the Tyniec monastery, Father Kazimierz Janicki, gave to Father Leon Knabit the mission of reactivating the oblates community. At that point in time Father Leon kept in touch with about 25 “veteran” oblates, but the “recruitment campaign” which he very actively organized and executed not only personally, but also by publishing information about the institution of oblation, soon brought fruit in the shape of an extensive organizational development, as well as in terms of numbers, of the Tyniec Oblates community. In addition to the erstwhile oblates new candidates appeared, among them some families and many young people. Soon the group counted membership of between 40 and 50. There were monthly meetings, with the Holy Mass in the beginning (in the chapel at the Opatówka, the Abbot’s House), followed by a conference.

In 1983 Father Leon Knabit was transferred to the Lubiń monastery in Wielkopolska region. After him the duties of the director were taken over by Father Ludwik Mycielski. The group grew in strength and its size stabilized. The most important achievement of that period was doubtlessly the work on the Statutes of the Tyniec Oblates, Father Ludwik’s labour, finished and affirmed by the Abbot Augustyn Jankowski on 30th September 1985. For the first time the oblates of the Tyniec monastery had a set of rules regulating their activities. But Father Ludwik left Tyniec to build a new Benedictine community, which finally has settled in Biskupów. The next directors were Father Adam Kozłowski, Father Wawrzyniec Ratajczak and Father Wincenty Jekielek.

Since March 2002 the care of the oblates was entrusted to Father Włodzimirz Zatorski and his position was defined as a prefect. He has served at this post with a break in 2009/2010 due to his sabbatical, in which time the prefect was Father Tomasz Dąbek. The community grew in numbers relatively quickly and became more active, stabilized and counting over 100 members from all over Poland. Apart from the regular formation days once a month, the Oblates meet twice yearly for three-days closed retreats for the Advent and the Lent and once a year the day of formation takes the form of a trip to a place connected with the Benedictine order activity. The meeting on 11th July has taken on a special character, as it is the day of St Benedict. We have started celebrating it together, praying and witnessing the promise of the new oblates, voiced before the whole monastery community.

In 2008 the Statutes were revised by Father Włodzimirz Zatorski with the support of Dariusz Białecki, a lawyer. They were endorsed by Abbot Berbard Sawicki on 6th January 2009. So for the second time the oblates have received a set of rules regulating their activities and as an addendum – an extensive *Guide of the Benedictine Oblate*. The Statutes in their new version have made it a requirement to organize the National Convention of the Tyniec Oblates. We have had three such occasions so far: in 2003, 2008 and 2013; presently we enjoy the fourth of such gatherings.

There were some organizational changes introduced as well – among others, a post was created for the coordinator of the Tyniec Oblates and in 2009 Teresa Lubowiecka was entrusted the position. The oblates got also their first IDs. We have contacted oblates communities affiliated to other monasteries in Poland and abroad, we take part in the World Congresses of the Benedictine Oblates, who everywhere and everyday are striving to put to life St Benedict's creed: "so that in all things God may be glorified". In 2017 the coordinator's duties were entrusted to Krystyna Fuerst. Currently the community numbers around 130 members and numerous sympathizers.