

Review

# Cooperation of the Commune and Parish in Poland in XXI Century as the Implementation of Community Activities

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**Abstract:** The commune and the parish are units of two divisions: government and church administration. Both were created for the better functioning of structures and the implementation of central activities: government and the mission of the Church. Their functioning is based on meeting the needs of the local community. In turn, their goals, although seemingly divergent, often overlap, because the main mission of both types of units is the good of community members. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to address in this article the issue of methods of cooperation at the lowest level between local government authorities and parish priests operating in the commune. This article presents a theoretical introduction, analyzing the ways in which both spheres operate, with an emphasis on places of cooperation in order to create a unified community, which is defined as both a commune and a parish. The aim of this article is to outline a framework for future empirical research that could clearly indicate the factors shaping the methods and forms of cooperation between these two entities.

**Keywords:** community; commune; parish; cooperation



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*Lord Jesus, You prayed to the Father in Heaven for unity for Your disciples. You know how much we need it. Without it, the community collapses. We come to You, to the God of Peace, asking for the grace of unity for our group. Please, Beloved Jesus, take away from us the spirit of quarreling, division and slander. May our community be united with You and in You.*

*Lord, make us respect each other and be patient with each other. Teach us, Jesus, how to love, teach us how to build a community. Sanctify us with Your Love.*

*Jesus, we give You everyone who is part of our community. We entrust to You, Lord, our joys and sorrows, desires and dreams. We believe that only in your hands will we be truly happy. Please, Lord, bless us, because without You nothing makes sense!*

*Mary, Mother of the Church, Queen of Peace, please take care of us, protect us from every evil, from every sin. Open us to dialogue and finding compromise, help us overcome pride, jealousy, anger and fatigue. Help us build the Kingdom of Jesus here on earth. Be our Guardian! Please teach us to follow Jesus and lead us to Him! Amen.*

(*Modlitwa za wspólnotę n.d.*)

## 1. Introduction

The current territorial division of state administration in Poland is based on the smallest unit, which is the commune. In turn, the territorial division of church administration is based on parishes. These units are not equivalent, because while controlling the implementation of administrative functions for an area such as a commune seems to be effective, the convergence of the parish area with the commune would significantly hamper pastoral activities in such a vast area. Hence, there are currently 2477 communes ([Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2023a](#)) and 10,352 parishes in Poland ([Przeciszewski 2023](#)). There are, on average, 4.17 parishes in the commune. However, in urban communes this value

increases, while rural communes have fewer parishes. The activities of both communes and parishes are aimed at meeting the needs of residents of a given area, members of the parish community or members of the municipal community. In communes, it is the implementation of statutory tasks and in parishes it is pastoral activities. A Christian living in a given area therefore becomes a member of two communities: the commune and the parish. In his everyday life, he usually feels connected to the place of residence and identifies with both of them. He participates in the life of the commune by taking part in local elections and local patriotic celebrations. But he also devotes his free time to participating in non-governmental organizations that activate residents to act for the common good. Moreover, this activity is more common in the case of activities at the local rather than national level (Marks-Krzyszowska et al. 2022). The same person, being a believing member of the parish, takes an active part in preparing the Church by cleaning or decorating, but also engages in the activities of parish communities. As research shows, believers feel a greater need to cooperate for the common good, both at the parish level and in the local government community (Tatala et al. 2024). Hence, the activities of both bodies, penetrating the everyday life of residents, interpenetrate each other and, wanting the good of the members of their communities, they support each other in their activities. The literature related to the functioning of local government units usually discusses the issue of cooperation between the commune and non-governmental organizations (foundations, associations) and public benefit entities, which are considered to be additional implementers of social policy (Kosowski 2012; Wojciechowski et al. 2014; Faliszek 2022). This type of cooperation is even recommended in legislation. In Poland between the years 1772–1918 the Church played an extremely important role, often taking over the functions of local government in periods of lawlessness or lack of Polish statehood, unifying Poles in striving for freedom and rebuilding statehood. Nowadays, in social and political discourse, there are two obvious ways of shaping the relationship between the state and the Church. One assumes cooperation, and the other cuts off these two spheres of life, which for many Poles are inseparable (Krukowski 1980; Sobański 1992; Szymanek 2012; Mazurkiewicz 2005; Hamburger 2009; Audi 2011). This article presents a theoretical introduction, analyzing the ways in which both spheres operate, with an emphasis on places of cooperation in order to create a unified community, which is defined as both a commune and a parish. The aim of this article is to outline a framework for future empirical research that could clearly indicate the factors shaping the methods and forms of cooperation between these two entities. The analysis of the achievements of theological literature on the functioning of Polish parishes and economic literature on the functioning of municipalities suggests social policy as the main area of cooperation. In turn, the grassroots activity of residents is carried out both in the area of local government and parish activities, which brings to mind the possibility of achieving synergy by combining these activities for the good of the community. This article does not definitively determine the degree of cooperation carried out by individual communes and parishes, but is only an outline for broader research that is necessary in the face of growing discussions on this topic. The considerations in this article will focus on the mutual penetration of local government and parish life, as well as the mutual assistance that these two bodies provide to each other.

## 2. Commune

The commune, as a local government unit, has been operating in Poland since the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 17 March 1921, which introduced for the first time a three-level division of the state (Ustawa z dnia 17 marca 1921 r.—Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1921). However, in the areas of the Prussian partition, communes had already existed earlier, since 1808 (Stawicki 2015). The modern administrative division is the result of the Act of 8 March 1990, on municipal self-government (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 o samorządzie gminnym 2023). Already in art. 1 we find the wording that “The inhabitants of the commune constitute, by operation of law, a self-governing community”. This Act in Art. 7.1 indicates “securing the collective needs of the community” as the

commune's own task. In this article, we also find a detailed list of groups of issues that the legislator understands as collective needs. This detailed list includes infrastructure, social and cultural issues. This provision cannot be considered a limitation of the independence of local government, which is a basic feature of local government units (Kobiałka 2017). This is only an indication of areas that seem important from the point of view of the overall functioning of the state. The commune determines the method and scope of implementation of the indicated groups of activities independently through internal planning documents, both annual and multi-annual, approved by the Commune Council. Such documents include the unit's activity plan and budget on an annual basis and, in the long-term perspective, the commune's development strategy (Hoinkis et al. 2021). The commune, based on stakeholder analysis, decides which areas indicated in the Act are a priority for it. The factors that are taken into account in the first place are the demographic data of the commune (population, age) and the economic situation of residents (professional activity, income, housing situation). Next, the current situation of a given commune is considered: the state of its finances, infrastructure and activities undertaken in previous years, including an audit of the status of investments in progress. The main goal of the activities undertaken is to meet the needs of residents, but also to create an image of a place that is friendly to residents and business entities, both existing and looking for a place to start their business. In order to include specific activities in the budget planned for implementation in the following year, the commune has a tool at its disposal in the form of public consultations. As research shows, the use of this tool is still limited in Poland and is rather related to the creation of long-term development plans than to the process of adopting the municipal budget (Wojciechowski et al. 2014; Tatala et al. 2024). As it was said in the prayer above: "Open us to dialogue and finding compromise, help us overcome pride, jealousy, anger and fatigue" (Modlitwa za wspólnotę n.d.). The noticeably low activity of residents in the area of social participation should be an important area for improvement for the commune (OECD 2023). Undertaking and financing activities for which there is no support among residents is a contradiction of statutory requirements indicating that the commune should meet the needs of the local community. Some communes start this improvement with active cooperation with non-governmental organizations, in which participation is more attractive for residents than cooperation with the commune, which is still understood as taking political action. These, in turn, are the aftermath of the communist period in Poland (1945–1989), and are still associated with negative feelings (Marks-Krzyszowska et al. 2022). The research conducted by Tatala, Klamut and Timoszyk-Tomczak shows that there is a positive association between prayer and social involvement and social participation (Tatala et al. 2024). There is no conclusion provided regarding this positive association but the results of their research confirm the thesis that this is an area requiring further research, and for municipalities it is an indication of where to look for solutions to improve the involvement of residents in the life of the municipality. Of course, we cannot stop reaching out to residents through various types of non-governmental organizations. Especially since a joint discussion on planned activities and the possible involvement of non-governmental organizations in their implementation is a fulfillment of the principle of subsidiarity (Wojciechowski et al. 2014; Kryk 2017).

From a marketing point of view, the process of satisfying the collective needs of the inhabitants of a specific area can be called the commune's product. At the same time, it should be emphasized that this is an unusual product because not in every situation does the user pay for it directly (Gajdzik 2008). Indirectly, by paying taxes, it participates in financing the functioning of administration at both the central and local government levels. By definition, taxes are mandatory, so a citizen cannot resign from paying them without consequences or determine on his own how much he will pay. Paying taxes does not grant citizens the right to use public goods and services to a certain extent. The method of redistribution of tax revenues is determined by specific laws and the state budget and the budgets of local government units (LGUs). The goods and services offered by communes

can be used mainly by residents, but also by business entities operating in the commune and various types of institutions and organizations, including non-governmental organizations.

Although municipalities are not entities established to conduct profit-generating business activities, they must be managed in a way that allows them to obtain funds to carry out the tasks entrusted to them. The act specifies what financial and organizational resources a commune can use, and additionally, national action policies are defined at the central level, for which the commune is designated as the implementer. To carry out its own tasks, the commune has its own revenues, which are generated mainly from local taxes and participation in central taxes (Gorzym-Wilkowski et al. 1999). Additionally, as the Act mentions in 8.3, the “necessary financial resources” should be given to the commune if the government unit wants the commune to undertake some tasks (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 o samorządzie gminnym 2023). However, it often happens that, knowing the financial capabilities of the unit, the mayor and the Commune Council must make difficult decisions regarding limiting or cancelling the tasks initially planned for implementation. In other situations, when the activity is of great importance for the functioning of the commune, it is necessary to look for external funds in the form of EU project funding or taking out a loan in the form of municipal bonds or a bank.

Both the scope and nature of activities and the method of financing, although directed by law, depend largely on the people who were given power in a given commune as part of local government elections. This legitimization is done by the residents. The commune head, president or mayor of the city and members of the Commune Council or the City Council are representatives of the inhabitants of the area over which they have been entrusted with management. It is also the residents who will hold their elected representatives accountable in the next elections based on the effects of their work. The Act indicates that meeting the needs of residents is the main goal of the commune, and the method of appointing its authorities additionally reinforces the need to take into account the will and interests of residents in the efficient management of the commune.

### 3. Parish

The functioning of a parish is legally defined in the Code of Canon Law in Chapter 6. In canon 515, we read that a parish is a “defined community of the faithful” (Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego 2021). This code indicates that a parish operates in a specific territory, just like a commune. A similar approach is presented by Pope Francis in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “a parish is a form of the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for listening to the Word, growth of Christian life, dialogue, proclamation, sacrificial love, adoration and celebration” (Pope Francis 2013). In Poland, starting from the Baptism of Poland in 966, there was an administrative division of the Church, initially centered around the bishopric and the diocese of Poznań. The current shape of the territorial division was initiated after Poland regained independence. At the parish level, the cut-off year for shaping the territorial system was 1952, and at the diocesan level, 1972. Currently, in Poland, most parishes are diocesan, and only a small part of them are monastic. Regardless of the nature of the parish, they are assigned a specific territory (one or more villages, an entire town or several streets of a given city). Since Poland regained independence in 1918, and especially after World War II, there were efforts to adapt the territorial layout of the parish to the local government administration system. Most of the post-war work was conducted in the 1990s due to the administrative reform (Klima 2011). To this day, no effective compromise has been reached, and in the face of the progressive departure from the Church and the decreasing number of priests and monks, the issue of merging parishes is increasingly being considered (Przeciszewski 2023). While the commune is provided with financial resources to carry out its tasks, and from the point of view of the staff of the commune office, the implementation of the parish’s tasks focuses on the parish priest, or a vicar/vicars assigned to the parish. More and more often, it is indicated that the parish shepherd should cooperate with the lay faithful in carrying out his activities, as a form of respect for “their participation in the common priesthood” (Przygoda 2019). In

approximately 80% of parishes, there are additional parish councils, financial councils, or other bodies as representatives of the faithful, which participate in meetings with the parish priest to determine the actions necessary to be implemented in the parish (Biela 2023). The Code stipulates that in the event of problems with parish staffing, the parish priest may take care of the faithful of more than one parish. Such a situation is not possible under any legal circumstances in relation to the implementation of the commune's tasks. July indicates that for the Church the most important resources ("appropriate means") were offered to it by Christ in the form of the word of God, sacraments, and love (Lipiec 2022a). While the scope of activities undertaken by the commune is outlined by law in some areas in quite detail and in others generally, parishes have as their main goal the promotion of the Word of God and the administration of sacraments. Like the commune, the parish focuses on service activities. Municipal services include: administrative service for residents, ensuring safety, access to primary education and maintenance of road, water and sewage infrastructure, as well as social assistance and health care services. In turn, parish services, or rather pastoral service, include: providing access to the sacraments (Holy Mass, confession, anointing of the sick), spiritual and prayer support. Priests often engage in serving the sick, elderly and those in need through direct help or organizing parishioners for common help. However, there is no voluntary choice of services to be provided by the parish. The center of the parish's activity and life is the celebration of the Eucharist, which cannot be replaced by other activities undertaken either by the parish priest or the faithful (Megger 2015). "The Church cannot give up preaching the word of God, administering the sacraments, praying and practicing Christian love because it would thereby betray the mission defined by the Founder and would lose its identity" (Lipiec 2022a). However, while fulfilling their basic mission, parishes also carry out pastoral activities, which are conducted by parishes, but are specified at the diocesan level (Popovič 2022). There is no top-down model of performing pastoral functions. Archbishops and bishops, as heads of dioceses, are given the authority to run the diocese and are accountable for its implementation to the Pope, as head of the Church. Once a year, the bishops of all dioceses in a given country attend a meeting with the Pope, during which they present reports on the functioning of the diocese at both the organizational and financial levels. The main direction designated in dioceses is implemented in parishes after identifying the features that characterize parishioners and the local community as a whole. The pastor, aware of the uniqueness of the parish members, is able to plan specific activities. The implemented pastoral models include a model of supporting parishioners in meeting their needs, based on a certain social interventionism, which is often criticized as implementing secular activities instead of an evangelizing mission, but is positively received by the faithful (Biela 2008).

However, it cannot be denied that the implementation of more extensive pastoral activities requires specific financial resources. In this matter, parishes rely on donations from parish members. Such higher-cost activities include not only renovations, expansion of the temple, but also providing help to those in need or organizing free time for children and young people living in the parish. It is estimated that 80% of the Church's revenue comes from donations from the faithful (Przeczyszewski 2023). The financial resources of individual parishes depend largely on the financial resources of their parishioners. In many parishes, the funds collected from donations and collections are insufficient and are then supported by offerings for the sacraments (which in wealthier parishes go directly to the clergy). In critical situations, the parish is co-financed from the solidarity fund that operates at the diocesan level.

#### 4. Cooperation

The Act on Municipal Self-Government does not directly indicate the parish as a stakeholder or "organization" with which the commune should cooperate under the Act. Points can be considered direct links between the commune and the parish. 13 of the previously mentioned Art. 7.1, which indicates as the area of interest of the commune municipal cemeteries, also known as municipal cemeteries, or point 7, directing the attention

of municipalities towards monuments, which are often churches or chapels. The opinion of the Regional Chamber of Audit in Lublin clearly specifies that financing the expenses of the Church or other religious groups is not legally justified, even if these activities, e.g., investments, would improve the quality of life of residents by, for example, eliminating architectural barriers for easier movement of disabled people or building a shelter for the homeless that will not be directly managed by a municipal unit. "(...) investing in facilities on areas belonging to other legal entities is not one of the commune's own tasks resulting from the above-mentioned. art. 7 u.s.g.<sup>1</sup>" (RIO 2022). Interestingly, in the same opinion we find the indications mentioned above regarding cooperation between the commune and the parish in the area of municipal cemeteries and renovations of historic buildings, which was implemented in the form of financing the renovations of historic buildings from the Grant of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage to co-finance work on the monument, which parishes willingly used in 2023, saving the decaying buildings of ancient churches, chapels and shrines. The funds from these subsidies allowed for renovation or security activities in many smaller parishes that had not yet been able to afford renovation works, the cost of which in the case of buildings and structures entered in the register of monuments is much higher due to the need to preserve the historic character or use specific materials indicated by the curator.

We should examine the groups of tasks that are of interest to both the commune and the parish. These are mainly social, family, and senior issues. In both theological and economic publications, we find that the common area of activity for both entities is social policy. The commune is interested in such activities from the point of view of the Act and the parish from the point of view of implementing pastoral activities. Residents of the commune, who are also members of the Catholic Church, expect support from both of these institutions. The method of implementing activities in this area remains to be agreed upon. The analysis of the acts and detailed provisions determining the operation of the commune and its obligations clearly indicates that the commune has no statutory obligation to support or cooperate with the parish. This applies equally to all religions. Such cooperation is required only in relation to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public benefit entities. Local governments, mainly at the district level, are obliged to keep records of this type of organizations operating in the district, and increasingly, due to the growing popularity of corporate social responsibility, also to report on activities undertaken in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and public benefit entities. This applies equally to all denominations. However, the contribution made by religious legal persons to the implementation of social policy tasks is noticeable. Hence, the Act on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteerism gives religious legal entities the opportunity to use the rights granted to non-governmental organizations. However, it is necessary for public benefit activities to be included in the statute of a religious legal entity. Another form is the establishment of a foundation or association by a religious legal person, which happens in two ways: directly by religious associations and through parishioners (Dworska 2022). This opens up the opportunity for parishes to submit offers for the implementation of public tasks. This is a legally recognized form of obtaining funding from the commune for activities undertaken by parishes. Such activities mainly include organizing various forms of winter and summer recreation for children and teenagers, as well as cultural events focusing on preserving local cultural heritage. A preliminary analysis of the websites of several communes shows that in the case of rural communes, it is the parishes that volunteer to carry out this type of public tasks. There is greater diversity in urban communes, mainly due to the functioning of non-governmental organizations there. Other activities undertaken in practice result from a possible synergistic effect or local traditions developed over the years, but due to legal restrictions, they must be carried out without the flow of financial resources. It is rather organizational and informational support, showing the unity of the local community being built.

The cooperation activities of modern communes and parishes do not surprise members of the Catholic Church. It is something natural for them. For non-believers, this cooperation is often a reason for strong opposition, centered around the recurring topic of separation

of the state and the Church. The creation of local societies (villages, tribes, cities) is historically older than the history of the Catholic Church (if we limit this history to the creation of Christian communities). However, attention should be paid to the similarity of nomenclature: currently, in Poland, we call a commune a unit of local government. Returning to the beginnings of Christianity, we also encounter the word “commune”, used in the context of Christian communes, i.e., communities in the early Christian Church, whose members gathered to cultivate the teachings of Christ: prayer, the Eucharist and the sacraments. In the Bible, we found: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts of the Apostles. *Bible*. p. 2:42. In the English version, the word “commune” is replaced by “fellowship” but the meaning is the same. The apostles called for staying in community after the Crucifixion of Jesus both in the Acts of the Apostles and after the Ascension in the Letters to Nations (ex. 2Corinthians 13:14). It can therefore be concluded that Christian communes were the cradle of modern parishes.

The coexistence of the commune and the parish can be best observed during national holidays (May 3, August 15, November 11) and local holidays (anniversaries of Nazi or Soviet crimes, commune fairs, parish or commune harvest festivals). Mayors and city presidents plan local celebrations together with the surrounding parishes so that they can begin with Holy Mass. At the same time, they do not forget about active participation with the residents in these masses, and they invite priests serving in municipal parishes to the “official”, sometimes called “secular” part. By joining in such celebrations, the parish takes care of the festive setting of the Holy Masses. References to the celebration appear in the introduction to the Holy Mass and especially in the calls in the prayer of the faithful. These are calls composed by the celebrant especially for this ceremony, which is confirmed by the analysis of the content of the calls: Prayers of the Faithful, based on the publication Sunday Service of God for years A, B and C (Gotschalk 2012). This was a publication used in the Church for the celebration of the Eucharist in three areas: introduction, Kyrie, and universal prayer. The publication is divided into 3 years A, B and C, consistent with the division of liturgical years. The proposed calls concern Sundays, holidays, and celebrations, which gives a total of 69 proposals for each year. Conversations with priests show that currently the Church in Poland does not use this type of publication—the parish receives a set of proposals for the next week from the Diocese. It is believed that such a solution allows us to respond to the current needs of the community of believers and to adapt the calls for universal prayer to emerging problems. However, it was decided to analyze the attitude towards proposing invocations for the local community in the universal prayer. In the introduction, the author refers to the General Introduction to the Roman Missal, which points out that universal prayer should include invocations for the Holy Church, for those in authority and for people in various needs. The analysis has shown that the most common calls come from those in power/ruling/legislating law. For year A, 27 such calls were proposed, 22 were proposed for year B, and 24 for year C. They refer mainly to prudence in decisions, farsightedness, wisdom, and fair distribution of natural resources. The second group analyzed were calls for the parish community (parish residents). In the analyzed item, five were proposed for year A, three for year B, and two for year C. The most interesting, from the perspective of this article, were the proposals for calls for the local community or those governing the commune. There were the fewest proposals for such calls. They appeared twice in year A and once in year C.

1. “Let us pray for the rulers of our country and our local community: for the common good”. (Gotschalk 2012).
2. “Let us pray for all the inhabitants of our city (our village/housing/commune/district) for God’s blessing”. (Gotschalk 2012).
3. “Let us pray for the rulers of our country and our local authorities”. (Gotschalk 2012).

This confirms that parish priests who actively cooperate with local government units in creating unity of the local community must create such calls themselves. Conversations with parish priests on this topic indicate that they do not consider it an inconvenience.

Many years of cooperation mean that such calls do not pose a problem for them. They know the situation of the local government units in which they conduct pastoral activities and in their calls they combine concern for eliminating these problems with reference to the theme of the ceremony in which the Holy Mass is celebrated. They also point out that, knowing about difficult or good moments in the life of the local community, they often initiate calls for the community during Holy Masses.

It is worth noting that the content analysis showed that, in addition to direct calls for parish residents, local government authorities or government authorities, there are very often prayers for specific social groups: the poor, the unemployed or representatives of professional groups (mainly doctors and social workers, volunteers). On average, there are proposals for calls from this category every second Sunday.

The second area that shows the cooperation between the parish and the commune are pastoral announcements used to convey important messages to the local community by the commune authorities or municipal institutions (Social Welfare Centers). In the case of short advertisements, their entire content is read. In other situations, the celebrant informs about displaying municipal information in the display case. In the case of rural communes, where a large percentage of residents still lack access to the Internet and at the same time active participation in the life of the Church is recorded on the part of a large part of the inhabitants, this is an action that allows for the elimination of information exclusion. These include announcements about material support offered by the commune or in the form of supporting services, about upcoming deadlines for submitting various types of applications, or about the availability of advice, the possibility of conducting medical tests or taking advantage of expert consultations, mainly for farmers (Wojciechowski et al. 2014).

Strong cooperation between municipalities, non-governmental organizations and parishes could be observed when the war in Ukraine broke out. Help was provided from all sides, but organizationally it was mainly the municipal authorities who controlled it all, coordinating activities undertaken locally by various social groups, including parishes. The latter, in turn, played an important role not only in the area of prayer but also in the area of organization and information about possible forms of help (Sitek 2023). Helping others is deeply rooted in the Christian faith. Hence, researchers see nothing strange in the fact that religious people are more willing to engage socially (Tatala et al. 2024; Rynio 2021).

The cooperation of local governments and parishes, both in Poland and around the world, is not free from criticism. This criticism has waxed and waned over the years. In recent years, with the increasing secularization of society, critical voices have become increasingly clear. This is influenced not so much by the noticeable need to take community, multi-directional actions, but by the Church's increased interference over the years (especially since 1989) in the functioning of the Polish state at the central level, especially in the form of some sensitive laws (the right to abortion or the legalization of civil partnerships). The lack of room for discussion regarding the definition of family, unconditional defense of conceived life, as well as cases of various types of abuses in the functioning of the Church in Poland publicized in the media mean that interest in active Christian life and religious practices at the level of participation in Holy Mass and participation in the Holy Sacraments or religion classes in schools is decreasing (Przeczyszewski 2023). The results of the National Census revealed a decrease in Catholic declarations from 89% in 2011 to just over 71% in 2021. The number of people refusing to answer the question about belonging to any religion also increased from 7.1% in 2011 to 20.53% in 2021 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2023b).

The implementation of local government functions is closely related to maintaining the existing support and gaining new support in the next local government elections. Some local government officials do not decide to cooperate with representatives of Christian movements, including parishes, because it is inconsistent with the political line of the party (election committee) they represent. In other, indirect situations, this cooperation is limited to a minimum due to the fear of losing the votes of residents who declare an anti-Christian, liberal or centrist worldview. The game of politics and ideology often gets in the way of the idea of community and cooperation on the way to the common good. There is no

willingness or opportunity to seek compromise and develop methods of cooperation. And sometimes society itself clearly opposes such cooperation, striving to clearly separate the state from the Catholic Church, despite the greater effects that can be achieved.

The blame for the lack of cooperation between the commune and the parish cannot be placed solely on politicians. Clergy also do not express interest in such cooperation when they do not agree on their worldviews, even though it could bring significant benefits to the local community (Wrońska 2010).

Creating a cohesive community requires multilateral effort and, in the case of cooperation between the commune and the parish, also prayer, like the one quoted in the introduction. The patience mentioned therein is necessary to enter into conversations about the possibilities and also the conditions that will guarantee respect for the goals of each party in the face of caring for the common good, which is the local community and its development.

## 5. Quality of Cooperation

In the literature, we can find attempts to determine (measure) the level of quality of cooperation between the commune and non-governmental organizations. Assuming that the Church, due to its social nature and lack of pursuit of profit, is similar in its operation to non-profit organizations, it is possible to use these measures also to determine the quality of cooperation between the commune and the parish (Lipiec 2022b). The cooperation quality index developed by the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw examines 6 areas that can be quantitatively measured (Makowski and Dudkiewicz 2012):

- the existence of a basic infrastructure of cooperation, in which it is crucial to operate/define points or areas of cooperation within the framework of formal agreements;
- public availability of elements of cooperation infrastructure, examined by analyzing the content of the commune's websites, which should include information on financial and non-financial forms of cooperation with NGOs;
- financial cooperation - analyzed based on the number of signed contracts for the implementation of public tasks, the number of entities willing to implement these tasks and the variety of forms of cooperation;
- non-financial cooperation - determined on the basis of non-financial forms undertaken, i.e., advisory, cooperation, free mutual lending of owned goods;
- knowledge and opinions of non-governmental organizations on the conditions of cooperation - the availability of information on the principles of cooperation, examined using a survey method;
- satisfaction of non-governmental organizations with cooperation with local government - determined on the basis of the results of a survey among NGOs.

The cooperation quality index described above is successfully used to analyze the cooperation of municipalities with non-governmental organizations in various geographical aspects: throughout Poland, specific voivodeships or poviats<sup>2</sup>. Including this description in the article is intended to indicate that it is possible to use this index to examine the quality of cooperation between communes and parishes. As mentioned earlier, the commune is not obliged by law to cooperate with the parish, unlike non-governmental organizations. Hence, this cooperation most often takes an informal form in the commune's internal documents, as is the case with NGOs. Therefore, it would be difficult to determine the measure mentioned by Makowski and Dudkiewicz first. The next three can be found because the parish appears in municipal information as an entity willing to implement tasks assigned to alcohol prevention and violence prevention programs, mainly in the form of trips with parish children and youth during holidays and holidays. The condition for providing such support is that the trip program includes various educational forms aimed at increasing young people's awareness of the threats related to stimulants, addiction, and violence. In recent years, such programs have placed particular emphasis on cyberbullying, stalking and other forms taking place on the Internet. Knowledge, opinions, and satisfaction are areas that require specific survey research. This article is an announcement of further analysis

of the areas of cooperation between communes and parishes, as well as determining the quality of this cooperation and the benefits felt by community members thanks to such cooperation.

## 6. Conclusions

An analysis of the legal and actual situation shows that cooperation between communes and parishes functions in Polish reality, despite growing social and political opposition. The topic of the lack of legal grounds for financing activities undertaken by the Catholic Church or other religious associations is more often raised in economic literature. Additionally, it is also a topic often discussed in everyday media. However, the mission of the Church as helping those in need and suffering is omitted. Because, as John Paul II recalls in the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, “man is the first path along which the Church should follow in fulfilling its mission” (John Paul II 1979). The commune and the parish, as established to create communities and even referred to as a community in the legal acts establishing them, operating in the same area, with almost the same people, should unite their activities to obtain better results. Each of them has different tools, financial, material, and persuasive resources in their hands, which when combined provide a powerful tool for bringing the common good. In some areas, the goals of the commune and parish are divergent or rather affect different spheres, but this should not prevent us from taking joint action.

Research to date has focused on separately analyzing the effectiveness of municipal and parish activities, a possible analysis of the legal basis for undertaking joint activities, or possibly the financing of parish activities by municipalities. However, social sciences are obliged to undertake research to show the effects that can be achieved thanks to the cooperation of these two entities. Hypotheses that seem worth investigating are:

[H1]: Municipalities cooperate with parishes as often as with non-governmental organizations.

[H2]: Cooperation between the commune and the parish stimulates social participation.

[H3]: Cooperation between the commune and the parish brings mutual benefits.

[H4]: The cooperation between the commune and the parish does not constitute a closed catalog of activities.

[H5]: The local society supports including the parish in the catalog of non-governmental organizations with which the commune can cooperate.

It is necessary to recall the role that the Church in Poland played in difficult moments for the Polish statehood, but also to show that the high quality of cooperation between communes and parishes produces a high social effect. These activities and cooperation are carried out nowadays, sometimes a bit hidden, so as not to cause public outrage. It may be worth conducting nationwide research to hide the identification of municipal units that undertake such activities, while showing the scale and quality of such cooperation to make it clear that what is good cannot be hidden.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> u.s.g.—Ustawa o samorządzie gminnym (Act on municipal self-government).

<sup>2</sup> The administrative division in Poland is divided into three levels: voivodeships, poviats and communes. Voivodeships are the highest level of division. Poland was divided on 1 January 1999 into 16 voivodeships and still it is the same number. Each voivodeship is divided into poviats, of which there are currently 380 in total (including 66 cities with poviat rights) ([Główny Urząd Statystyczny n.d.](#)). The poviat, with the exception of cities with poviat rights, is divided into communes (2477 as of 1 January 2024). In Poland, the administrative division is related to the division of public tasks, the implementation of which rests with each of the above-mentioned units. Depending on the type, a commune covers several villages (rural commune), several villages and a city (urban-rural commune) or only the area of one city (urban commune).

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