

POLAND PROVINCE

Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Norway and Kaliningrad Oblast - Russia

Official Languages: Poland – **Polish**, Ukraine – **Ukrainian**, Latvia – **Latvian**, Norway – **Norwegian**, Russia – **Russian**

Vision Statement

With a mission of first proclamation, we witness to God's presence in the world by following the example of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word.

Mission Statement

We, members of the religious-missionary and international community of the Polish province of the Society of the Divine Word, live out the charism of our Founder, St. Arnold Janssen. In a spirit of dialogue and open to the signs of the times, we pursue our mission in Poland through the following evangelizing activities: ongoing formation on an individual and community level; vocation ministry and formation of future missionaries; spiritual and material support of the missions; ordinary and special ministries; academic research and teaching work at universities and schools; apostolic work through the mass media. We seek dialogue with: foreigners; addicted and marginalized people; people seeking truth and purpose in life; and adherents of other religions and secular ideologies. In this way, we seek to awaken and cultivate missionary awareness in Polish society, in cooperation with the local Church.



1. Societal Setting

The Polish Province was founded in 1935. Its original shape changed after World War II.

It now covers four countries: Poland, Ukraine, Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Latvia (a new mission started in 2014).

Poland: Poland's population of 38.5 million is 97% Polish. National and ethnic minorities include those of Russian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Czech, German, Karaim,

Lemkos, Rom, Tatar and Jewish backgrounds. Some 87.5% of the population is Catholic.

Ukraine: About 77% of the Ukraine's population of 45 million is Ukrainian. National and ethnic minorities include people of Russian (17.3%), Belarussian, Moldavian, Polish, Bulgarian, Jewish and other backgrounds. Orthodox Christians make up 76.7% of the population, Catholics 14.7%, and non-religious 14.7%. In 1991 Ukraine declared independence and left the Soviet Union. In 2015, pro-Russian separatists stirred unrest in Eastern Ukraine, leading to military conflicts. The fighting continues, with 10,000 dead and 1,300 driven from their homes by the end of 2016.

Latvia: Latvia's population of 2 million is 62% Latvian, with other national and ethnic minorities composed of people of Russian (26.9%), Belarussian, Ukrainian, Polish, German, Lithuanian, and Jewish backgrounds. The religious affiliation of the population includes Lutherans (35.5%), Catholics (21.5%), and Orthodox (17.8%, mainly Russian). In 1991 Latvia declared independence and left the Soviet Union. In 2004 Latvia joined the EU and NATO.

Norway: Catholics born in Norway (including immigrants' offspring) comprise about 38% of the Catholic population. There are parishes where the natives are actually a minority. Majority groups are other Europeans (including Polish), Asians (mainly Vietnamese, Filipinos and Tamils), North and South Americans (mainly Chileans) and Africans (Eritreans, Ghanaians,

Nigerians and others). Multiculturalism is visible among both the clergy and laity. The likelihood that your local parish priest is a Pole, Vietnamese, Dutch, Irish, German or Tamil rather than a Norwegian, is high. The official language is Norwegian, which immigrants and their priests speak with various degrees of success. There has been an increase of local (Norwegian) vocations in recent years.

Russia - Kaliningrad Oblast: Kaliningrad Oblast is a federal subject of the Russian Federation, located between Lithuania and Poland. Its population of 941,000 is 82% Russian. Ethnic and national minorities include those of Belarussian (5%), Ukrainian (4.9%), Lithuanian, German, Polish, and Azerbaijan background.

Since 2004, many Polish (around 2 million), Latvians and Ukrainians have migrated to Western Europe seeking better jobs, leaving behind their spouses and children. It has given rise to serious social problems: broken families and children growing up without one or both parents, the so-called 'European orphans'. As a member of the European Union and the Schengen Area, bordering with the non-EU countries, Poland has one of the most restrictive immigration policies in the EU. Nonetheless, there are many immigrants, mainly economic ones, from Ukraine, Vietnam, China, Korea, Chechnya and Africa.

2. Ecclesial Setting

The Catholic Church in Poland maintains her strong position, despite the recent decline in voca-

tions and continuing laicization of the public life. A 2016 survey showed that 39.1% of the faithful regularly attend Sunday Mass. The numbers vary greatly in different regions of the country (from 24.8% in the diocese of Łódź up to 70.7% in the diocese of Tarnów). Dioceses and religious congregations run many retreat centers for people wanting to deepen their faith or find meaning in their lives, or those who opt to combine holidays with a spiritual formation. There is a long pilgrimage tradition in Poland, especially to the Marian shrine in Częstochowa. The largest NGO in Poland is Caritas, swiftly responding to emergencies in Poland and abroad. The largest weekly is *Gość Niedzielny* (Sunday Guest), published by one of the Polish dioceses. The Redemptorists run TV and radio stations and publish a daily paper.

The Catholic Church in Poland runs many kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and higher education institutions (2 universities and 4 papal theological faculties). Six state universities have faculties of theology. The Church runs annual Days of Judaism (since 1997) and Days of Islam (since 2001), as well as many mission oriented events, like the World Mission Sunday, followed by the week-long activities, or Prayer for the Mission on the feast of the Epiphany. The latter is often accompanied by the so-called procession of the three kings, the grassroots initiative of a group of faithful from Warsaw. Since its inception in 2004, the tradition has grown considerably throughout the country, with the celebrations in over 500 towns in 2017. There are over 2,000 missionaries from Poland (religious, *Fidei donum* and lay) working in 95 different countries.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	33	16.0	17.3	16.5
Education	17	8.3	8.1	5.2
Schools	9	-		
Universities	8	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	6	2.9	11.8	12.0
Administration/ Support	35	17.0	17.7	20.2
Other Apostolates	18	8.7	18.4	17.8
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	7	-		
Others	8	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	7	3.4	3.0	3.0
Retired/Sick	51	24.8	15.8	9.8
Others	39	18.9	7.9	5.5

There are 15 mission houses and 13 parishes in Poland, 2 parishes in Kaliningrad Oblast, 3 parishes in Ukraine and 2 parishes in Latvia.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: Several confreres are working in the biblical apostolate.

Mission Animation: Many confreres are engaged in raising the mission awareness among the laity, preach retreats in various parts of the country, and run retreat centers at our mission houses. Eight confreres lecture at four universities in theology, missiology, ethnology, religious studies, philosophy and law.

JPIC: Our work with immigrants is the main focus.

Communication: We publish a monthly magazine *Misjonarz* (“Missionary”) and a journal *Nurt SVD* on missiology, anthropology and religion twice per year.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Primary and New Evangelization: Our main work in Poland is mission animation. We work with our friends and benefactors. We also do a lot of vocation animation. Regular meetings with the mission supporters and fund raising by the local mission offices bring considerable advantages. We are aware that the mission and vocation animation cannot be the domain of the respective offices only. The traditional way of seeking new candidates to SVD, based on retreats for the youth, is not working as efficiently as it used to. We must find some other ways of making young people interested in religious and missionary life.

Migrants: More immigrants come to Poland every year. The *Fu Shenfu* Migrant Center in Warsaw has been providing a variety of services to them for many years, and we are expanding our activities. Recently, we have taken responsibility for the pastoral care of migrants in Łódź.

Family and Youth: Two new initiatives aimed at families and young people are the *SVD School of New Evangelization* in Nysa and the *Apollos Missionary Voluntary Service*. Among the objectives of the former is to enliven our parishes and raise the mission awareness of the faithful, possibly to the point of making them interested in taking up temporary mission engagements. We avail ourselves of the experiences of the German and Austrian provinces and other missionary congregations in Poland in this regard.

making young people interested in religious and missionary life

Collaboration with SSpS

We cooperate with the SSpS at 4 parishes and 3 mission houses.

SVD Lay Partners

In addition to our collaboration with our mission supporters and benefactors, as well as the laity in our parishes, we cooperate with lay people in service to the marginalized, poor and addicts, especially in the Family Support Association *Road* in Białystok, founded by Fr. Edward Konkol SVD, and the *Fu Shenfu* Migrant Center in Warsaw.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	1	1	1
Clerics	175	167	177
Brothers (final vows)	30	23	22
Brothers (temporal vows)	1	4	5
Scholastics	16	25	61
Novices	0	7	14
Total	223	227	280

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	56.2	53.7	45.4
Nationalities	8	7	10

Spirituality: The Polish province mission statement (20th Provincial Chapter, 2009) declares that we aspire to shape ourselves in the image of Jesus Christ through living in fraternal community, contemplation of His Word, the Eucharist, prayer, asceticism and basic and ongoing formation.

Community Life: Most confreres participate in the activities of the province with a great commitment. We have a retirement home for sick and elderly confreres and our parents in Gorna Grupa. It was only about twenty years ago that the Polish province could begin to experience multiculturalism. As of 2017, there are ten foreign confreres in final vows and five in basic formation. Thanks to their presence, our seminarians can experience the internationality of the Society from the beginning of their formation.

Foreign confreres involved in important works of the province are a visible sign of the universality and unity of the Church and openness to others. It is especially important in the face of the growing migrant crisis in Europe and the tensions this brings.

Leadership: There was a workshop for superiors and councilors at the beginning of the present triennium. Important provincial positions and offices are occupied by confreres.

Finance: The Polish province is self-sufficient financially. It supports the mission activities of the Society via the generalate. Our main source of income is our benefactors, but we must seek alternatives. We have introduced a new accounting system to improve the financial transparency and responsible use of material resources.

Formation: Thanks to a great number of professional academic teachers at the Divine Word Seminary in Pieniężno (as never before) and its affiliation to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, our seminarians receive quality intellectual and spiritual formation. Unfortunately, due to a sharp decline in vocations, their number has decreased dramatically.

The provincial commission on ongoing formation and spirituality runs formation workshops for all interested twice a year, and the annual provincial retreats in four different locations. The participation rate is 30% and 80% respectively.