

Youth Ministry in Poland in the Teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis: Selected Contemporary Challenges and Pastoral Implications

Duszpasterstwo młodzieży w Polsce w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II, Benedykta XVI i papieża Franciszka: wybrane współczesne wyzwania i implikacje pastoralne

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Abstract: This article examines selected contemporary challenges for youth ministry in Poland in the light of the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. It focuses on trends in religious practice, mental health issues associated with digital media, and social and ecological engagement among Polish young people. The study combines an illustrative review of selected empirical indicators (ISKK, CBOS, WHO) with a comparative theological analysis of papal teaching. The empirical data are used as a contextual framework rather than as an exhaustive diagnosis of Polish youth. The analysis identifies substantial continuity in the teachings of the three popes, centred on personal encounter with Christ, formation in faith, missionary responsibility, and pastoral accompaniment, while also showing shifts of emphasis corresponding to changing socio-cultural conditions. These perspectives have implications for both ordinary parish youth ministry and specialised pastoral forms directed towards existential and social peripheries. The article argues that the renewal of youth ministry in Poland requires personal accompaniment, authentic communities, the prudent use of digital media, and the integration of faith with young people's social and ecological concerns.

Keywords: youth ministry, Polish youth, secularisation, digital media, mental health, papal teaching, pastoral accompaniment

Abstrakt: Artykuł analizuje wybrane współczesne wyzwania dla duszpasterstwa młodzieży w Polsce w świetle nauczania Jana Pawła II, Benedykta XVI i papieża Franciszka. Koncentruje się na trendach w praktykach religijnych, problemach zdrowia psychicznego związanych z mediami cyfrowymi oraz zaangażowaniu społecznym i ekologicznym młodych Polaków. Badanie łączy ilustracyjny przegląd wybranych wskaźników empirycznych (ISKK, CBOS, WHO) z porównawczą analizą teologiczną nauczania papieskiego. Dane empiryczne służą jako kontekst interpretacyjny, a nie jako wyczerpująca diagnoza polskiej młodzieży. Analiza wskazuje na istotną ciągłość w nauczaniu trzech papieży, skoncentrowaną na osobowym spotkaniu z Chrystusem, formacji w wierze, odpowiedzialności misyjnej i towarzyszeniu pastoralnym, przy jednoczesnych zmianach akcentów odpowiadających zmieniającym się uwarunkowaniom społeczno-kulturowym. Perspektywy te mają znaczenie zarówno dla zwyczajnego duszpasterstwa młodzieży w parafiach, jak i dla wyspecjalizowanych form pastoralnych skierowanych ku peryferiom egzystencjalnym i społecznym. Artykuł wskazuje, że odnowa duszpasterstwa młodzieży w Polsce wymaga osobistego towarzyszenia, autentycznych wspólnot, roztropnego korzystania z mediów cyfrowych oraz integracji wiary z troskami społecznymi i ekologicznymi młodych ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: duszpasterstwo młodzieży, młodzież polska, sekularyzacja, media cyfrowe, zdrowie psychiczne, nauczanie papieskie, towarzyszenie pastoralne



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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary youth in Poland face profound socio-cultural transformations, among which the processes of secularisation, the strong influence of digital media, and the intense search for

meaning in a world marked by relativism and existential crisis are particularly evident. Empirical data indicate a significant decline in religious practices among younger generations, a considerable deterioration in mental health associated with excessive use of social media platforms, and simultaneous manifestations of vibrant social and ecological engagement. Although these phenomena form part of a broader European context, in Poland they are characterised by exceptional intensity, posing a challenge for the Church that requires the adaptation of pastoral forms to the current needs of young people.

It should be noted, however, that statistically, the vast majority of Polish youth live in stable family environments, attend school or study, and undertake professional work. This group constitutes the primary focus of ordinary pastoral ministry carried out in parishes. The negative phenomena discussed in the article concern a growing portion of young people, yet their aetiology is complex and extends beyond secularisation, mental health crises, the influence of new media technologies, or the individualisation of religiosity. They encompass, among other factors, demographic changes and family structures, educational and professional pressures, globalisation processes, and a broader individualisation of worldviews. Consequently, youth ministry should be treated as an organic part of parish pastoral care. In addition, there are forms of special (extra-parish) and specialised ministry directed towards assisting young people in difficult situations that often require integrated support – in a certain sense, this is what Pope Francis refers to as the notion of “peripheries”.

The topic of the article is significant because it concerns the future of the Church in Poland – youth who constitute its “now” and not merely a distant prospect. In this context, the article undertakes an analysis of selected phenomena among young people in the light of the teachings of St John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, and indicates the resulting perspectives for the renewal of pastoral care in both its ordinary and specialised dimensions.

1. SELECTED PHENOMENA AMONG POLISH YOUNG PEOPLE – EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

This part of the article presents theological perspectives in relation to selected empirical phenomena among Polish young people. We do not claim to offer an exhaustive diagnosis of the condition of all Polish youth, who – as noted in the introduction – mostly follow standard educational, family, and professional paths. These data serve as an illustrative context for

theological reflection based on the teachings of the three popes. Negative phenomena have complex causes, which include not only processes of secularisation and the influence of digital media, but also broader socio-cultural transformations.

The process of secularisation in Poland manifests itself in an accelerated decline of religiosity among younger generations. This phenomenon can be interpreted within the framework of classical theories of secularisation, which assume that modernisation and the development of industrial society weaken the influence of religious institutions on social life (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002). At the same time, the Polish context is closer to the concept of “believing without belonging”, which emphasises the individualisation of religious beliefs while remaining distant from institutional practices (Davie 1994). Later revisions of secularisation theory, however, challenge the linear and inevitable character of this process. Berger himself, in works from the late twentieth century, abandoned the original paradigm, pointing out that religious pluralism and globalisation may lead to the desecularisation of the world and a revival of religiosity in new, non-institutional forms (Berger 1999). Similarly, Rodney Stark argues that secularisation is not a universal sociological law, but results from limited competition in the religious market; under conditions of a free religious market, one rather observes the vitality and innovation of faith communities (Stark 1999; Stark and Finke 2000). In the Polish case, the rapid decline of institutional practices coexists with the search for individual spirituality, which suggests a transformation rather than the disappearance of religiosity.

Studies on the religious condition of secondary-school pupils between 1988 and 2017, as well as analyses of pre-synodal surveys, document a systematic decrease in participation in religious practices (Marianński 2018, 141–150; Tutak 2018, 177). In the 18–24 age group, the percentage of regular practitioners (at least once a week) fell from 69% in 1992 to 23% in 2021, while the number of those declaring no faith rose to nearly 29% (Grabowska 2021; Przybysz 2022, 231–232). Young people participate ever less frequently in the Eucharist and the sacraments, a trend that coexists with moral relativism and a crisis of faith.

Statistical data presented by the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics (ISKK 2024) confirm the continuation of the downward trend. In 2023, the sacrament of confirmation was received by 293,984 people, whereas in 2024, approximately 213,000 people received it,

representing a decline of nearly 28%. Regarding school-age youth, a decrease can also be observed in the number of pupils attending religious education classes: from 78.6% in the 2023/2024 school year to 75.6% in 2024/2025.

Despite the changes described above, Poland continues to stand out with a higher level of declared religiosity among youth than most countries of the European Union. Nevertheless, the pace of secularisation among Polish youth is among the fastest in Europe and is approaching the continental level.

Table 1. Selected Indicators of Secularisation among Polish Youth

Table presenting selected indicators of secularisation among Polish youth from 2018/2019 to 2024/2025. It shows a decline in attendance at religious education classes, a decrease in the number of confirmations, and a substantial fall in regular religious practice among people aged 18–24.

Year / School year	Attendance at religious education classes (%)	Number of confirmations (thousands)	Regular religious practice (18–24 years, %)
2018/2019	~88	~350	~40
2021/2022	~82	~320	23
2023/2024	78.6	294	~23
2024/2025	75.6	~213	~22 (est.)

Source: Author's compilation based on ISKK (2023, 2024), Grabowska (2021), and Przybysz (2022).

The observed processes of secularisation coexist with (and are interdependent with) the influence of digital media, which shape attitudes towards religion and modify the functioning and mental well-being of young Poles. Social media platforms have become the main source of information about national and world events for a significant proportion of people aged 18–24 (CBOS 2025). People under twenty-five predominantly make regular use of Instagram and TikTok. The intensity of use of these services is associated with poorer mental well-being; this is observed among those who spend more than five hours a day online (CBOS 2025).

Excessive engagement with digital media contributes to the deepening of the mental health crisis and existential crisis of contemporary Polish youth. The latest reports indicate persistently high rates of suicidal ideation (approximately 17–25% among adolescents) and depressive symptoms (over 41% in secondary schools), with almost all of those experiencing suicidal thoughts having been victims of violence, most frequently psychological violence

(Fundacja Dbać o Mój Zasięg 2025; Solecki 2025). This crisis forms part of a broader European context, yet in Poland it is distinguished by higher rates of depressive symptoms and a continuing rise in suicide attempts among youth (WHO 2025).

The table below collates key indicators of the situation of young people in Poland and the European Union (data for the period 2021–2025):

Table 2. Selected Indicators of the Situation of Young People in Poland and the European Union

Table comparing selected indicators concerning young people in Poland and the European Union, including participation in religious education, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, problematic social media use, and social engagement. The data indicate relatively high levels of mental-health difficulties among Polish youth, while declared social engagement remains comparatively strong.

Indicator	Poland (youth/schools, 2024–2025)	EU (average or range for youth)
Attendance at religious education classes	75.6%	No direct equivalent; >50% non-religious in many countries
Depressive symptoms	>41% (secondary schools)	5–6% (clinical disorders); higher symptoms in youth reports
Suicidal ideation (active)	~17–25%	Leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds
Problematic social media use	~11–15%	11–13% (2022–2025)
Social engagement (declared)	78–80% (15–29 years)	Poland above the EU average (EU Youth Report 2024)

Source: Author's compilation based on ISKK (2024), CBOS (2025), WHO (2025), European Commission (2024), and Fundacja Dbać o Mój Zasięg (2025).

Despite the dominant negative trends, Polish youth display numerous positive characteristics, including a high and stable level of social engagement on a longitudinal scale: declarations of volunteering and civic activity have remained at 70–80% from the 2010s to 2025, placing Poland above the European average in local and ecological participation (European Commission 2024). A high level of social engagement is declared by 78% of people aged 15–29 and encompasses volunteering and civic actions; 71% of respondents consider such activities very important (Stowarzyszenie Studenci dla Rzeczypospolitej 2023, 16). Ecological sensitivity, for example, was confirmed in the mobilisations following the Oder disaster in 2022 (Kopeć 2022, 219).

The condition of Polish youth reflects many phenomena common to the European Union: progressive secularisation, the negative impact of digital media, and a mental health crisis. At the same time, however, it is characterised by an accelerated pace of religious change among young people, an intensification of mental health problems, and a higher level of social and ecological engagement. In the face of the challenges thus diagnosed, it is necessary to turn to the theological foundations of youth ministry elaborated in the teachings of St John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

2. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE THREE POPES

In the context of the post-conciliar renewal of the Church, inspired by the Second Vatican Council and its emphasis on evangelisation and the role of the laity, John Paul II gave impetus to a new approach to youth ministry, the global expression of which became the World Youth Days he initiated (Duda 2022, 466). The Pope described young people as the “hope of the Church”, placing emphasis on a personalist anthropology and on World Youth Days as a privileged place of encounter with Christ. The words “Put out into the deep” (*duc in altum*), which John Paul II frequently employed, refer to the Trinitarian, Christological, and Marian foundations of Christianity. According to the Pope, it is precisely on these foundations that young people recognise their vocation: to the love of God the Father, redemption through Jesus, and sanctification in the Holy Spirit. Knowing and accepting Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life is, according to John Paul II, the fruit of discovering one’s own path as a Christian (Lipiec 2014, 10–11, 19–30).

During the 20th World Youth Day, “We have come to worship him” (Mt 2:2), John Paul II recalled the key elements of his teachings on youth. He drew attention to the fact that young people constitute the hope of the Church, and that World Youth Days are an opportunity for a true encounter with Christ. He also encouraged young people to prepare spiritually for the event in Cologne by imitating the Magi from the East, who followed the star in order to worship the newborn Messiah. According to the Pope, what matters is not only the technical organisation of the meeting itself, but above all the preparation of the heart in an atmosphere of faith and openness of mind to the Word of God (John Paul II 2004, no. 1).

The personalist anthropology so central to John Paul II serves to underline the value of freedom and of a personal response to God's call. The Pope invited young people to offer Christ "their very existence": the freedom to choose a path of life out of love and to respond faithfully to His voice, as well as fervent prayer in a spirit of gratitude. An encounter with Christ leads to transformation and conversion, which find expression in courageous – sometimes even heroic – decisions such as the choice of a priestly vocation or consecrated life. The Eucharist remains continually the central place of adoration and encounter with Christ because, by grace, it sustains World Youth Days as a place of encounter with Christ (John Paul II 2004, nos. 3–4, 6).

Young people appear as the hope of the Church, especially in the perspective of the new evangelisation:

The Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelisation: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others. The Church needs saints. All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity (John Paul II 2004, no. 7).

Although the message does not contain an explicit call to "put out into the deep", there is an analogous invitation to set out boldly after Christ, to leave everything and to strive to follow Him, which forms part of the continuity of teachings on trust in God and the missionary engagement of young people (John Paul II 2004, nos. 1, 6).

Continuing the post-conciliar reflection on faith in a secularised world, Benedict XVI – in the context of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* and *lectio divina* on the relationship between faith and reason – deepened that reflection, defending Christian truth against relativism and criticising the dangers of digital culture. He emphasised the importance of catechesis and intellectual formation, pointing to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of unity and love. The defence of truth is the task of all the baptised, for which one must prepare already in youth (Lipiec 2014, 14, 19–30). A key element of the theological foundations of youth ministry remains the role of the Holy Spirit as the greatest gift of the Risen One (Fiałkowski and Sadlak 2021).

In the message for the 23rd World Youth Day in Sydney (2008), Benedict XVI emphasises the action of the Holy Spirit as the source of power for evangelical witness in a world afflicted by injustice, egoism, and secularisation. He stresses the necessity of a deep understanding of faith through the Word of God and the sacraments, which constitutes an

intellectual and spiritual formation enabling growth in relationship with Christ. Catechetical deepening of the understanding of the Holy Spirit leads to an ever deeper and more joyful understanding of Jesus, uniting faith with intellectual reflection (Benedict XVI 2007, no. 1).

The Pope appeals for renewal through the sacraments of Christian initiation, which confer grace and prepare the faithful to bear witness. Lack of engagement in these sacraments leads to a weakening of faith, whereas their conscious reception fosters spiritual and missionary development. In the context of contemporary challenges such as injustice, violence, or secularisation, young people should display courage in proclaiming the truth of Christ as a response to relativism and the crisis of meaning. Although the Pope does not refer directly to digital culture, he emphasises the need for a new evangelisation and a “new Pentecost” as a way of renewing the Church and the world (Benedict XVI 2007, nos. 6–8).

In the context of the Church’s synodal path, initiated by the Synod on Young People in 2018 and already signalled in 2013 in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasises the importance of accompaniment, synodality and the use of the media in the process of evangelisation. Young people are described as the “now of God”, and the Church is obliged to go out actively to the peripheries of society (Lipiec 2018, 19–30; Wielebski 2018, 11–18). The primary responsibility for supporting young people rests with ecclesial communities (Lipiec 2014, 17). Referring to the exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of John Paul II, one may distinguish four key dimensions of formation that are reflected in Pope Francis’s teachings on youth (Bielecki 2024, 16). The relational character of the human person makes it possible to lead young people to an encounter with Christ through authentic interpersonal relationships (Chrupek 2020, 86).

The exhortation *Christus Vivit* (2019), the fruit of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to young people (2018), constitutes a current manifesto of the theological foundations of youth ministry in the teachings of Francis. It emphasises accompaniment and synodality as key elements of the Church’s relationship with the young. The Pope emphasises the necessity of listening, creating spaces of dialogue, and journeying together, in which pastors fulfil the role of guides rather than authoritarian decision-makers. Synodality, understood as “journeying together”, takes into account the charisms of all members of the Church, enabling authentic accompaniment in the maturing of faith (Francis 2019, nos. 203–204, 206).

The central motif is the vision of youth as the “now of God” – the fully fledged present of the Church, and not merely its future. “You are the now of God, and he wants you to bear fruit.” – young people bring dynamism and freshness, actively participating in the mission of the community (Francis 2019, nos. 64, 173, 178).

Francis develops the vision of a Church that goes out to the existential peripheries, where pastoral care meets young people in their real conditions of life – on the social margins, in situations of exclusion or migration. “Do not be afraid to go and bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away and most indifferent.” (Francis 2019, no. 177) – evangelisation here is based on humility, listening, and closeness (Francis 2019, nos. 35, 41).

Regarding digital culture, the Pope discerns both opportunities and risks. He recognises social media as an indispensable space of evangelisation, encouraging the creative building of fraternity and the transmission of Christian values. At the same time, he warns against loneliness and manipulation, calling for critical accompaniment of young people in the digital world (Francis 2019, nos. 87–88, 241).

Christus Vivit synthesises these threads into a holistic vision of pastoral care based on a personal encounter with the living Christ, growth in fraternal love, and missionary engagement (Francis 2019, nos. 209–214).

3. SYNTHESIS OF THE CONTINUITY OF TEACHINGS

The teachings of the three popes reveal a deep theological continuity that is rooted in a personal encounter with Christ as the centre of youth ministry, while at the same time disclosing specific shifts of emphasis adapted to the challenges of the age. John Paul II created a foundation of a distinctly Christocentric character, emphasising this encounter as the source of conversion, freedom, and missionary zeal, especially within the framework of World Youth Days, where young people become courageous witnesses of the new evangelisation (John Paul II 2004, no. 7; Lipiec 2018, 19–30).

Benedict XVI developed this foundation in a pneumatological direction, emphasising the defence of Christian truth against relativism and the power of the Holy Spirit that enables authentic witness. Through sacramental renewal and intellectual formation, he linked personal

encounter with Christ to reflection on the faith, preparing young people to proclaim the Gospel in a world of secularisation and injustice (Benedict XVI 2007, nos. 1, 6–8; Lipiec 2014, 14).

Francis broadened the vision with an ecclesiological, synodal, and merciful dimension, seeing young people as an active subject of the Church – “the now of God”. Going out to the peripheries and the creative use of digital culture continue the missionary call, yet through closeness, listening, and a shared journey (Francis 2019, nos. 64, 177, 203–206; Bielecki 2024, 16).

Continuity is expressed in three interdependent pillars: (1) personal encounter with Christ as the source of vocation and holiness; (2) the proclamation of evangelical truth in the face of contemporary challenges; (3) merciful accompaniment that takes into account the relational character of the person and the current cultural context (Chrupek 2020, 86; Lipiec 2018, 19–48). The teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis thus constitute a coherent response of the Church to the vocation of young people – adapted to changing historical conditions yet unchangingly rooted in the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the evangelising mission (Duda 2022).

Table 3. Comparison of Key Theological Categories in the Teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis

Comparative table summarising key theological categories in the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. It compares their emphasis on encounter with Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, mission and evangelisation, and the cultural context of youth ministry, highlighting both theological continuity and different pastoral emphases.

Category	John Paul II	Benedict XVI	Francis
Encounter with Christ	Central, Christocentric; source of conversion and freedom (WYD as a space of grace)	Deepened by intellectual and sacramental formation; leads to a more joyful understanding of Jesus	Personal, in the context of relationships and accompaniment; foundation of a holistic pastoral vision
Role of the Holy Spirit	Sanctification within the Trinitarian vocation	Source of power for witness; Spirit of unity and love in the face of secularisation	Implicit in synodality and journeying together
Mission and evangelisation	New evangelisation through saintly witnesses; “put out into the deep”	New Pentecost; courage in proclaiming truth against relativism	Going out to the peripheries; creative use of digital media

Category	John Paul II	Benedict XVI	Francis
Cultural context	Personalism and the hope of the Church in the young	Relativism, secularisation, injustice	Existential peripheries, digital culture, migration, and exclusion

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the sources discussed in Section 2.

The synthesis presented allows a transition to the practical implications for youth ministry in Poland. The teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis do not contain direct references to contemporary digital platforms or the mental health crisis of youth. They do, however, constitute a coherent anthropological and ecclesiological foundation that permits a theological interpretation of these phenomena.

The personalist anthropology of John Paul II, the defence of truth and intellectual formation in Benedict XVI, and the call to closeness and accompaniment on the peripheries in Francis provide criteria for evaluating both threats (digital loneliness, relativism) and opportunities (authentic relationships, social engagement). In this way, one can avoid both reducing the problems of youth to technological questions and isolating papal teachings from the current pastoral context.

4. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH MINISTRY IN POLAND

Papal teaching, in particular the apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* of Pope Francis, emphasises the importance of personal accompaniment of young people, based on patient listening and the building of authentic interpersonal relationships. The essence of this approach is conveyed by the Pope's words:

Let us help young people. Let us have ears attuned to listening to their dreams – they need to be listened to – to listening to their successes, to listening to their difficulties. One must sit down, listen perhaps to the same libretto, but with different music, with a different identity. Patience in listening! I ask this of you with all my heart! In the confessional, in spiritual direction, in accompaniment. Let us know how to lose time for them. Sowing costs and tires, it tires a great deal! The harvest gives greater joy! (cited in Fiałkowski 2019, 38–39).

- Parish dimension (inspired by John Paul II). Introduce a mentoring programme in preparation for confirmation, in which young adults (18–25 years) accompany adolescents not only in catechesis but also in the personal discernment of vocation – in accordance with the personalist anthropology of John Paul II that emphasises freedom and the offering to Christ of “one's very existence”.

- Intellectual and spiritual formation (inspired by Benedict XVI). Organise regular “parish–school–family” meetings with an element of lectio divina and shared reflection on Sacred Scripture, in order to counteract relativism and the crisis of meaning.
- Accompaniment on the peripheries (inspired by Francis). Establish inter-parish or diocesan teams for young people in crisis (mental health, exclusion), collaborating with psychologists and social services, while simultaneously offering a sacramental and communal space – realising the call of *Christus Vivit* to go out to the existential peripheries.

The above lines of action constitute an attempt to concretise the teachings of the three popes in Polish pastoral realities. The realisation of these proposals requires, however, that account be taken of existing structures and pastoral experiences described in the literature on the subject. Directly inspired by the exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Wielebski (2020) presents detailed guidelines for the renewal of youth ministry in Poland, taking into account the contemporary sociological and psychological profile of young people as well as existing pastoral structures. This perspective is developed by the documents of the Synod Biskupów (2024), which emphasise digital culture as a new environment of faith formation and recommend a synodal approach to evangelisation in the digital space.

On this foundation, youth ministry is realised on several key levels, with the consistent use of social media as tools of evangelisation. The building of authentic relationships requires personal accompaniment, most effectively realised in small communities and within mentoring relationships (Bałdyga 2018, 213; Fiałkowski 2018, 235). The use of social media presupposes careful adaptation of evangelising content and a conscious transition from virtual contact to face-to-face meetings – for example, through the organisation of in-person events inspired by online content, which increases the durability of relationships and deepens formation (Jeżak-Śmigielska 2018, 387; Małek 2018, 407). Formation for the discernment of life and professional vocation takes place mainly during workshops and retreats (Lubowicki 2018, 273–290). Close collaboration with the family, school, and youth movements is also indispensable, with a particular role played by catechists and organisations such as the Catholic Youth Association (KSM) (Czekała and Czekała 2018, 259; Szpet 2018, 317).

These tendencies converge with international observations, where the Church increasingly emphasises evangelisation in the digital environment. In the United States, the organisation Life Teen successfully combines social media with in-person events such as camps

and youth conferences (Life Teen 2024). Vatican initiatives, including the Jubilee of Digital Missionaries in 2025, promote a global network of Catholic influencers focused on authentic witness and invitations to personal meetings (Vatican News 2025; Synod Biskupów 2024). The evangelising potential of social media is confirmed both by international initiatives (Vatican News 2025) and by Polish examples of the creative use of digital platforms.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented has revealed a complex picture of contemporary youth ministry in Poland. This picture is marked by a decline in religious practices, secularisation, mental health crises, and the dominant role of social media. In the light of the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, there emerge theological perspectives that may inspire the renewal of pastoral care both in its ordinary (parish) dimension and in specialised forms directed towards the peripheries. What remains key is personal accompaniment, the building of communities of belonging, the integration of social and ecological engagement with faith, and the prudent use of digital tools.

The key pastoral indications – building small listening communities, spiritual mentoring, presence in the online space, and projects that engage young people in the affairs of the world – require the systematic formation of pastors and inter-parish collaboration. Of particular importance is the preparation of pastors and youth leaders for work both with the majority of youth in parishes and with people requiring integrated specialised support. The effective renewal of youth ministry in Poland requires the systematic combination of personal accompaniment with the building of authentic communities and the prudent use of digital tools – in accordance with the continuity of the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

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