

# Parish as a communion of...?<sup>1</sup>

Jana Šídlová

ŠÍDLOVÁ, J.: Parish as a communion of...? *Studia Aloisiana*, 2018.

This paper attempts to show one of the first pieces of empirical research on a parish from the perspective of practical theology in the Czech Republic. It focuses on the Magisterium's teaching on the parish after the Second Vatican Council. A parish is seen as the Church in its fullness, but it must be in harmony with the diocese and the whole universal Church with an emphasis upon the cooperation between a parish pastor and the lay members. The parish is theologically a communion, being the key concept of the Second Vatican Council and the time since. The emerging results from the ethnographic research show that the explored parish has been influenced by the work of its last two pastors and is a place that realises the functions of the Church relatively well. *Keywords:* parish, community, koinonia, ethnographic research, practical theology

Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ does not want to stay alone with his own faith. He soon searches for others to share and experience their faith together in the community of believers. First of all, the universal Church is supposed to be such a community, the visible institution with the burden of human sin on one side and the invisible God's reality, 'the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery'<sup>2</sup> on the other. Every Christian is part of the larger universal Church; however, he practically realises his faith in her smaller parts. The smallest institutionalised part of the Church is the parish, which is the main topic of this paper.

First, the Magisterium's teaching on the parish will be presented then the next chapter will examine the relations between the Church as a whole and her smaller parts – relations between the universality and the particularity. The next part will deal with chosen theological concepts of the parish. These concepts include the ecclesiology after the Second Vatican Council that can be also used for the local Church and the systematic theology of the parish which seems to be insufficient in the Roman Catholic perspective.

<sup>1</sup> This study is a result of the research funded by GAJU no. 157/2016/H.

<sup>2</sup> LG 3.

The emerging results from the ethnographic research will be presented in the empirical part. The research was carried out between May and July 2017 in a chosen Czech Roman Catholic parish and it will continue in the autumn. The overt participant observation and several in-depth narrative interviews with the local pastors and parishioners were the methods used in the research. This area of Czech practical theology has not been used to work with the empirical methods so far. The paper aims to be one of the first attempts to approach the western empirical tradition within practical theology.

## The Magisterium's teaching on the parish

According to canon law, the parish is 'a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop.'<sup>3</sup> The parish forms a basic organisational unit of the Church and it is subordinated to the diocesan bishop who is the leader of the local Church (diocese). Only he can either erect or suppress parishes and provide them with a pastor under his authority. The parish is mainly a territorial unit but it also can be created for the reason of rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of a territory, or even for some other reason (for example, a student parish). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the parish

is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup>

The Second Vatican Council does not deal with the parish in its Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*. It mainly focuses on the relationship between the universal and the particular Church, a relationship that remained unsolved after the First Vatican Council. A diocese with its own bishop is believed to be a particular Church. He, however, cannot (ad) minister all of the territory of the diocese personally so he divides it into smaller units: parishes. These units

represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world. And therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy.<sup>5</sup>

---

3 CIC 515 §1.

4 CCC 2179.

5 SC 42.

The parish is also mentioned in connection with the roles of the laity in the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*. The parish here is the local community where the cooperation of the lay members is necessary for the whole Church life. 'The parish offers an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences within its boundaries and merges them into the universality of the Church.'<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II speaks similarly in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*. For him, a parish is the Church which is seen locally. The mystery of Christ is present there since a parish is a communion first of all, the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, gathered together while celebrating the Eucharist. Many contemporary parishes suffer from economic and personal problems (huge administrative agenda, lack of pastors and believers) and stop fulfilling their functions. The problems do not mean that a parish is an outdated institution. The Pope calls for a renewal. He suggests that the parish structures should adopt their full flexibility according to canon law with the participation of the lay members of the Church. He also calls for the support of the small 'living' communities,<sup>7</sup> 'where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another'.<sup>8</sup>

Pope Francis follows the statements of the previous popes. He highly appreciates the parish as noted in the first quotation of this paper. Calling for renewal was not absolutely successful; however, this should not be given up. The Pope's appeal for the renewal of the whole Church as indicated in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* begins with the parish. It is a flexible unit, capable of creating various forms and it can address families and those who are in need in the territory. 'The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.'<sup>9</sup> The Pope does not deprecate even smaller parts of the Church such as the basic communities or smaller communities within a parish. He finds them important for evangelisation and the renewal of the Church. He encourages them to be in close contact with their parishes and not to become sectarian or 'nomads without roots'.<sup>10</sup>

---

6 AA 10.

7 The pope means so-called 'basic' communities (*communida de eclesial de base – CEB*). Cf. DAWSON, A.: The origins and character of the base ecclesial community: a Brazilian perspective. In: ROWLAND, Ch.: *The Cambridge companion to liberation theology*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 117 – 118 or O'HALLORAN, J.: *Církev jinak: od základního společenství ke křesťanské obci*. Praha : Sít, 2006.

8 CL 26.

9 EG 28.

10 EG 29.

## Particularity vs. universality

Church documents after the Second Vatican Council agree on the fact that a parish, as the smallest institutional unit, is the full expression of the universal Church only if it lives in accordance with her. That is the reason why they insist on the mutual relationships. The smallest communities should be linked to a parish; a parish should be linked to a diocese and a diocese with the universal Church. To understand the mutual relations, we need to clear out those between the particular and the universal Church. The Czech theologian C. V. Pospíšil suggests that the most important statements are found in the text of *Lumen gentium*<sup>23</sup>.

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular church), fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which (**in quibus et ex quibus**) churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup>

The terms in which and from which (*in quibus* and *ex quibus*) are crucial in order to understand the relationship within the Church. According to *Lumen gentium*, the universal Church is a community of the baptised with God the Father, in Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit and also the mystery of the Body of Christ. The term *in quibus* refers to the distinctiveness of each particular Church. Pospíšil speaks about many mirrors that show the original Church to what extent they are illuminated by the true light. Now we approach the term *ex quibus*, which says that the particular Church is particular only as part of the universal Church. We can comprehend this relationship as a Trinitarian one – mutual interpenetration while maintaining its distinctive identity. The contemporary Roman Catholic perspective stands upon a certain tension, or better balance, between ‘*in quibus* and *ex quibus*’.<sup>12</sup> The centralistic theory of *in quibus* was dominant in the past; on the other hand, the second approach is typical for Protestant Churches or Eastern Catholic Churches.

---

<sup>11</sup> LG 23.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. POSPÍŠIL, C. V.: Některé otázky spojené s ekleziologií společenství (4), in: *Teologické texty*, 4/1998.

## The parish from the broader theological perspective

The parish is a primary Christian community but, in Roman Catholic theology, it is theoretically reflected upon only rarely. The Czech dogmatic theologian J. Dolista believes that there exists no systematic theology of the parish in the European context.<sup>13</sup> According to the Bible in the Book of Acts, the community is realised through the teaching of the apostles, brotherly love, the breaking of bread, and prayer. A parish has also a mission of evangelization and care for the poor and needy. The first chapters of Acts show how the first Christian communities grew through diaconia and proclaiming the Gospel. It is God himself who gathers and build his people. The believers in the community of the parish follow Christ's example and proclaim the Kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

Dolista argues that a parish must have certain features that are existentially necessary for its healthy development. These are mysticism, diaconia, diaspora, eschatological hope, and an advocating function before God. Mysticism means accepting the fact that a parish is not primarily a sociological reality but a mystical community rooted in God.

It is necessary to overcome this lack of mysticism, which is given by sociological factors, fears and worries. On the contrary it is necessary to accept others, praise and share. The encounter with God or his inspiration can come through the encounter with other people, especially the poor; through reading the Bible in the community or individually, through celebrating the Eucharist.(...)Every believer has to feel accepted in the whole Church. The community cannot be a community of religious individualists and closed persons.<sup>15</sup>

The fruits of mysticism are, according to Dolista, diaconia (care for those in need) and koinonia (brotherly love and sharing in Christ). Even in small and isolated parishes these fruits can be found, with the support of others in need. A parish is a place of eschatological hope and it is also its main aim to reach God's Kingdom together: 'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'<sup>16</sup> A parish also has a saviour function for the whole. It advocates before God for those who do not know Him.<sup>17</sup> 'The future of the Church is not in the quantity of her members but in the quality of faith, hope and love of her members who will probably create smaller communities.'<sup>18</sup>

13 Cf. DOLISTA, J.: Pokus o teologii farnosti – vybraná témata. In: HOJDA, J. (ed.): *Farnost na přelomu století: teologická reflexe*. Svitavy : Trinitas, 2000, p. 10.

14 Luke 7: 22.

15 DOLISTA, J.: Pokus o teologii farnosti – vybraná témata, p. 14.

16 Matthew 18: 20.

17 DOLISTA, J.: Pokus o teologii farnosti – vybraná témata, p. 16.

18 NOVOTNÝ, V.: *Odvaha být církví: Josef Zvěřina v letech 1913 – 1967*. Praha: Karolinum, 2013, p. 40.

## The parish as a community<sup>19</sup>

In view of the fact that there exists almost no systematic theology on the parish, we can use the ecclesiological bases used for the universal Church. The relationship between her and the particular Church was clarified above and it is also undoubted that a parish is first of all a community of believers. The term 'community' is a key concept of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and afterwards. It is therefore useful to present here some of the important concepts.

The Second Vatican Council's document on the Church *Lumen gentium* uses the term 'communion' for describing the nature of the Church. W. Kasper, M. A. Fahey and O. H. Pesch agree that the term is one of the most important topics of the Council.<sup>20</sup> However, there is no exact definition of this term in the documents. The term is used along with other words such as *communitas*, *societas*, *participatio* and others.<sup>21</sup> The theological interpretation of the Council gives to the term communion a new dimension. It is not the Church herself but rather a relationship between a person and God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit that is 'communion'. The model for this communion is the Holy Trinity.<sup>22</sup> Another Council statement considers the way a person is led into communion with God – through participation in God's Word and the celebration of the sacraments.

The use of the term communion shows the ancient Christian tradition and mainly the important meaning of the word *koinonia* in the New Testament: the participation in God's gifts: the Holy Spirit, new life, love, the Gospel and most of all the Eucharist.<sup>23</sup>

The Church is communion exactly in this sense since God is believed to be here and the sacraments are conferred. Her inner structure is communional; there is participation and sharing of the believers, which should generate the responsibility of all members for their communion. Further theologians, W. Aymans and J. King, work with the terms *communio* and *communio* as crucial terms when interpreting the Council text on the Church. W. Aymans, as a canon lawyer, finds the term an ideal concept to include the two most important images of the Church: the people of God and the Body of Christ. It

---

19 The next charter is a part from my unpublished paper: ŠÍDLOVÁ, J.: *Mystagogy: deepening the social dimension of youth's faith*. Unpublished paper.

20 Cf. KASPER, W.: *Theologie – součást naší doby*. Praha: Česká křesťanská akademie, 1994, p. 62 and FAHEY, M.: *Současný kontext ekleziologie*, in: *Systematická teologie II: římskokatolická perspektiva*, Brno: CDK, 1998 and PESCH, O. H.: *Druhý vatikánský koncil 1962 – 1965: příprava, průběh, odkaz*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1996, pp. 181 – 187.

21 The term *communio* itself includes many meanings, cf. ŠTĚCH, F.: *Tu se jim otevřely oči: zjevení, víra a církev v teologii kardinála Avery Dullese SJ*. Olomouc: Refugium Velehrad-Roma, 2011, pp. 264 – 265.

22 Cf. KASPER, W.: *Theologie – součást naší doby*, pp. 65 – 66.

23 PESCH, O. H.: *Druhý vatikánský koncil: 1962 – 1965 : příprava, průběh, odkaz*, p. 183.

includes the social dimension of the first image and the sacramental (invisible) character of the second image.<sup>24</sup> The Church contains a hierarchical structure which may be understood juridically because of the common celebration of the Eucharist (*communio*).<sup>25</sup> J. King prefers the term *communion* in the same way – as an umbrella term for the images of the Church mentioned above. They can be found in St. Paul's theology and should be united since there is only one reality – the Church – visible and invisible at the same time.<sup>26</sup> The present pope Francis also highly appreciates community in the Church, following the teaching of the Council. It is the Holy Spirit who is creating the communion of the People of God. The model for true communion is the Holy Trinity.<sup>27</sup> In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, the Pope refers to communion as an ideal which should be followed. Only such communion is able to give testimony and preach the gospel.

The ecclesiology of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century refers to the Church as a communion in various theological studies.<sup>28</sup> The traditional position that laid emphasis on the visible structure of the Church seems to be overcome after the Second Vatican Council. Contemporary ecclesiology does not deny the Church's visible structure but subordinates it to its invisible substance. The Church is primarily the pilgrim People of God and the Body of Christ. Her visible structure should be a sign of her invisible content. It places, however, great demands on the community of the Church. To be a credible sign means to fulfil Christ's demands and legacy: to preach the Gospel, gather in community for worship, celebrate the Eucharist, and serve people in need. These demands or functions of the Church are all important and cannot be separated. However, one function can be put in primary place and that is communion, which can be considered to be the basis for theological reflection of the Church. The community gains power out of liturgical celebration and is a space for fraternal sharing of faith, hope and love. Only such a community is a *communio* and can preach the gospel trustworthily and be a renewed evangelising community.<sup>29</sup>

24 A. Dulles also includes these two images into his communion model of the Church. Cf. DULLES, A.: *Models of the church*. Expandeded. New York : Doubleday, 2002.

25 Cf. RIKHOF, H.: *The concept of church: a methodological inquiry into the use of metaphors in ecclesiology*, London : Sheed and Ward, 1981, p. 57.

26 Cf. *ibid.*

27 EG 117.

28 For example, the ecclesiology of J. Ratzinger, A. Dulles and M. Kehl: see BENEDIKT XVI.: *Církev jako společenství*. Praha : Zvon, 1994. DULLES, A.: *Models of the church*, JUHÁŠ, V.: *Církev v medzičase: [ekleziologická štúdia jazykom piatich teológov: Leonardo Boff, Hans Küng, Medard Kehl, Jürgen Werbeck, Jürgen Moltmann]*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2011 and KEHL, M.: *Kam kráčí církev?:diagnóza doby*. Brno : CDK, 2000.

29 EG 24.

## Parish as a communion of...? What has the case study already revealed?

It is not possible to carry out research in all of the parishes in the Czech Republic and compare it with judgments and visions of Czech practical theology to show its relevance.<sup>30</sup> To make a beginning, and regarding the limited possibilities of a single, independent researcher, I have decided to carry out qualitative research in a chosen Czech Roman Catholic parish as a case study to show its functioning and the experience of some of its members. The chosen qualitative method will help me to delve deep inside. The qualitative research should provide the complex and comprehensive view on the chosen parish: show its functioning and the spirituality of its members with an impact on its communal dimension.<sup>31</sup> According to Swinton and Mowat, qualitative research methods are particularly helpful in going about this complexifying task, as they allow the researcher to “render the familiar strange”.<sup>32</sup> I have chosen an ethnographic approach<sup>33</sup> and its methods of overt participant observation and in-depth narrative interviews.<sup>34</sup> These seem to be relevant tools for exploring the Church.<sup>35</sup>

The research question to be asked in this paper is: How do parishioners experience their faith in the community of their parish? There is an inner experience of faith of the believers in the individual and communal dimension on one hand and the story of faith in the whole life narrative. On the other hand there is a parish as a place of lived faith: the research should show its functioning, structure and key features. The realisation functions of the Church, which are those already mentioned in the theoretical part of the paper, will be used as an

---

30 Czech practical theology deals with the parish in various conference proceedings, and also in works of A. Opatrný and a book by the archbishop J. Graubner. The parish is here presented as an ideal concept including its necessary functions that are supposed to be fulfilled. According to J. Graubner, the centre of a parish is the pastoral council, which takes responsibility for maintaining the key aspects of ministry. A. Opatrný values the parish in a more realistic way. However, for him, it should be a place of hospitality, a focal point for evangelisation, a place of life on the wings of faith and love, and a place where conflicts arise and are overcome. See GRAUBNER, J.: *Jak si představují farnost dnes*. Olomouc : Matice cyrilometodějská, 2005, OPATRŇY, A.: *Cesty pastorační v pluralitní společnosti*. Kostelní Vydří : Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2006 and OPATRŇY, A.: *Pastorační v postmoderní společnosti*. Kostelní Vydří : Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2001.

31 The communal dimension of faith is my main research topic. I have already made an unpublished pilot research on this dimension of youth faith using a phenomenological research. See ŠÍDLOVÁ, J.: *Mystagogy: deepening the social dimension of youth's faith* (unpublished study).

32 SWINTON, J., MOWAT, H.: *Practical theology and qualitative research*. 2. edition, London : SCM, 2016 quoted in: KAUFMAN, T. S.: *A New Old Spirituality? A qualitative study of Clergy Spirituality in the Nordic Context*. Eugene : Pickwick Publications, 2017, p. 19.

33 Cf. BREWER, J. D.: *Ethnography*. Buckingham : Open University Press, 2000.

34 HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum. Základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. Praha : Portál 2008, pp. 176 – 206. The overt participant observation enables the researcher to be part of the explored group and experience its functioning and practices (in this case religious practices). The in-depth narrative interviews helps to explore the spirituality in the context of the whole life of the believer.

35 Cf. WARD, P.: *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography*. Grand Rapids, Michigan : William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012, p. 2.

ideal concept to be compared with the reality of the explored parish. It should be mentioned that the research has not been finished yet so the following interpretations are not final. I have already carried out four in-depth narrative interviews and several overt participant observations in some small parish communities and at various events and regular Masses.<sup>36</sup>

The chosen parish<sup>37</sup> is located in a city with 22 thousand inhabitants; there are four churches in the parish, however only two of them are regularly used. It seems that the parish does not fit into the typology of A. Opatrný.<sup>38</sup> The city is too large and there is only one territorial parish. Around 120 people attend the Sunday Mass regularly; the parishioners declare that the number has been growing in the past ten years when the parish was ministered by two active pastors in sequence. There are a few smaller groups within the parish. There is a family gathering in a nearby family centre once a month for families with small children (around nine families regularly take part in this event). There is a youth group for teenagers and another for youth who are over 20 years old once a week. There is a weekly prayer group of the middle-aged generation, which is attended regularly by 15 people. There are also two groups devoted to the Virgin Mary (attended mostly by older women), praying together the Rosary or litanies and a group of mothers praying together (Mothers Prayers). Once a week there is also a biblical lesson with Bible reading and exegesis.

The parish pastor (aged 39) has been in the parish for over two years; before, he was a youth pastor in a youth centre and a parish chaplain in various places. According to him, the parish sufficiently fulfils its basic functions, being the realisation functions of the Church: liturgical, kerygmatic, diaconic and communal.<sup>39</sup> Concerning the liturgical function, there are a sufficient number of altar servers (about 15) of various ages, who are only boys or men as the pastor is not willing to change this tradition. There is also a good number of acolytes, lectors and other ministers helping with the liturgy. The music is provided by an organ player, parish choir and a music group.

Concerning the communal function, the pastor says that the parish truly is a communion. People there know each other and notice if someone is ill or missing: 'We know about each other, I carried out a test last time and asked the older altar servers if they miss somebody and they answered the old lady sitting at the back, and I find this really positive.' In the parish, they

36 The research will continue with more interviews (in-depth narrative interviews and focus groups) and observations that will look not only on the active core of the parish. The overt participant observation in the seminar *Life in the Holy Spirit* will be carried out. There should be also more theoretical reflections on spirituality to show more types, not only the charismatic, which is now seen as the dominant one in this parish.

37 Three similar parishes (size of the city, number of believers) were considered to be chosen. The selected parish is relatively compact, has the biggest number of the smaller groups inside and its pastor was the most open for the realisation the research within "his" parish. The openness is a key factor for a successful qualitative research.

38 Cf. OPATRŇÝ, A.: *Pastorace v postmoderní společnosti*, p. 52.

39 In some scholarly texts there is a fifth function – didache – which is education. Cf. Eph 4: 20.

are various groups for different age categories for praying and sharing the faith, which is not usual in the Czech situation.<sup>40</sup> The pastors plan to divide the existing groups into smaller ones (inspired by the concept of cell groups) to make the groups more open and attract other people. The diaconical function lies in care for the needy. Volunteers regularly visit the ill in their households and also in the hospital (in cooperation with the second pastor). Also, the parish financially supports the Child Sponsorship Programme under Caritas of the Archdiocese of Prague. The pastor misses a deeper connection to the local Caritas, especially when recruiting adult volunteers. The final function, the kerygmatic, should include proclaiming the gospel inside and outside the parish community. This is fulfilled by different lecture activities for the public in the city and various spiritual renewals for the parishioners. A combination of internal and external evangelisation is found in the catechumenate. A few adults were prepared for baptism and were baptised at Easter in the last two years. Another event with evangelisation potential is having an evening for praise and worship with an invited music group. These events are often attended not only by the parishioners but also by people from outside, searching for 'some kind of spirituality'. He admits that they might feel more comfortable in the church during these events than during Mass. For the next year there should be another round of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit (Life in the Holy Spirit) and the ALPHA course.

It was noted above that one more realisation function can be added to these four, being the function of didache. This would include catechesis of all of the age groups and other religious education activities. Catechesis for children is replaced by school religious education by the parish catechists, which is a problem for the majority of Czech parishes.<sup>41</sup> However, once a month there is preparation for First Holy Communion in the parish, led by a parish catechist for the children who attend the religious education classes at school. Catechesis of the youth is almost lacking, with the pastor finding it difficult to address young teenagers (12 – 15 years old) that are too young for the youth group but too old for the religious classes at schools and they refuse to attend them. Catechesis of the youth is through the youth group. Some catechetical topics are talked about, however, it is not any type of systematic education. The pastor explained, 'The bishop ... he was always talking about it, that these youth groups are only chatting with no catechesis, but this is not true. We regularly read the Bible and talk about it and I find it systematic as there is a real system in the Bible! We often work with the materials for the

<sup>40</sup> The Czech Roman Catholic Church is still burdened by the effects of 40 years of communism when expressing faith in public was abolished and in many cases penalised (bullying at work or school, or even worse). At the same time, there is a huge rate of secularisation and a small number of actual believers in the whole of Europe. Concerning the Roman Catholic Church, the numbers of declared believers are following: (1991) 4 021 385, (2001) 2 740 780, (2011) 1 083 899 (Source: [www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz)). The real numbers of those who actually take part in parish life are even smaller. Cf. [http://www.demografie.info/?cz\\_detail\\_clanku&artclID=161](http://www.demografie.info/?cz_detail_clanku&artclID=161), Hůle, D.: Věra deklarovaná x realizovaná.

<sup>41</sup> See GDC 73 – 74.

youth groups. So, for me, talking in a youth group is catechesis.' Catechesis for adults is also mainly biblical, through the Bible lesson once a week and occasional spiritual renewals.

The parish has a pastoral council but lacks an economic one. They do consider some economic issues but we cannot speak about financial independency as most of the operations are dependent upon approval from the diocesan bishop and the majority of parish income is also administered through the diocese. The pastoral council cares for the organisation of pastoral care in the parish and events planning.

The observations have taken part in the various groups within the parish and show that the pastor and, through him, the active core in the parish are influenced by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, especially the seminar Life in the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> He is also used to systematically working with the Bible in the community, which is not very usual in Roman Catholic communities. He introduces to all of the groups a similar system of working: prayers including worship, praise, thanksgiving and petitions, sharing or testimony, and reading the Bible. The pastor reckons he knows the structure from his youth. 'I know the structure from some old course for youth work about 20 years ago. We had a missionary there and he was talking about how they created the communities and what they do is this: there must be a warm welcome, praying together, topic or catechesis, and that's the way I do it.' In the parish, the group is middle-aged and is mostly based on praying together for an hour with a given structure: invoking the Holy Spirit, worship, praise, thanksgiving and requests prayers, and singing together with a guitar. The members of the group have all passed through the Life of the Spirit programme and all of them agree that they need intensive prayer for their lives. One parishioner reported, 'I must say that it gives me so much energy, even when I lead the group as we change the leadership and I am not afraid to do it anymore. The experience of faith when I am a leader is even bigger and enriching. I can let the Holy Spirit lead me and I wouldn't expect I could do it.'

## Faith as inwardness or a journey to knowledge

How do the parishioners experience their faith in the community of their parish? Now I would like to focus on two different journeys of faith and life in a parish. These interpretations are the outputs from two in-depth interviews with two respondents: a married couple of middle-age who were chosen due

---

<sup>42</sup> The seminar Life in the Holy Spirit is a ten-week programme for building and renewing the community of believers. The concept was created by a German missionary and leader of Catholic Charismatic Movement in Ghana, Ernst Sievers.

to their openness and willingness to participate in the research. These qualities are important for the qualitative research and in-depth interviews. According to my experience of the active laywoman in my parish, most of the believers are rather shy to talk about their faith.

Respondent A (female) grew up in a family where the Christian faith existed, albeit under communism in a very limited way. She was baptised as a child, they attended Church twice a year at Christmas and Easter and she was taught some basic common prayers. Only her grandfather's family from her father's side was deeply religious. After 1989, her father started to attend church regularly on Sunday and often took his daughter with him. She married a nonbeliever; however, they had a Church wedding and went through some catechetical preparation. Their three children were born within eight years and all of them were baptised as babies. The parents again went through Baptism catechesis for parents, fortunately with the same person (not the pastor) who prepared them for the wedding. The respondent admits that this catechesis and especially the experience of her children's Baptisms deepened inside her the desire for a more intensive faith. Afterwards, she decided to study a programme of religious education and ethics at the Faculty of Theology. During the study, she went through a short preparation and received the Eucharist for the first time. Shortly after that, a new pastor came to the parish and started 'to wake the sleepy parish up'. He invited the respondent into the parish music group and to the Life in the Spirit programme. The experience of the programme was crucial for her faith. It was the turning point from shallowness to inwardness, which she calls the true faith. 'You know, it is like something hidden really deep inside you, something that touched you and when you experienced it, it is so much deeply inside you and you cannot forget it as it is so real.' At the moment, the respondent works as a teacher in a school and as a catechist in the parish. She teaches religious education at the school and prepares the children for their First Holy Communion in the parish. She is also a member of the choir, the parish music group and the pastoral council. She dislikes negative assessments and the judging of others, especially those who do not do anything for the parish, merely giving advice. She does not have these feelings in the middle-aged prayer group, which she regularly attends every week. She loves praying and sharing faith together. 'I don't feel this in the group. It is kind of more open or warm there, you don't have to be afraid to say anything, maybe it is like this because it is a smaller group, I can't find the reason why it is better there, but I feel more comfortable or free in my faith there without any control or something like this.' At the same time, she regrets she did not pass any catechetical programme for adults (for instance, for Confirmation or youth catechesis, where she could have shared her knowledge with others), even though she is so onto finish her study of theology.

Respondent B grew up in an atheistic family. He admits that since his teenage year she has been attracted by mountains and high-placed areas and he has intuitively turned to some higher power above him. He went to church

for the first time when he met his future wife. Then he went through Church wedding preparation and also the preparations for the Baptism of his children. He talks about the fact that during these preparations he heard the same information four times at three-year intervals. These catecheses were exactly the same, led by the same person. However, every time he came through a different experience, as his 'knowledge was growing'. Together with this experience, he also felt the intensifying of his wife's faith after the Life in the Holy Spirit programme and a change (awakening) within the parish after two new pastors coming in the past ten years. In that time, his mother-in-law died and when she was passing away he felt, for the first time, the power of prayers and the Sacraments. Then he had a deep spiritual experience at the funeral of his father-in-law's mother, a deeply religious old Catholic woman. Soon after, he started to attend Sunday Masses more regularly, but he was afraid to make the last step towards declaring his faith. While the Credo was spoken at Mass, he usually stopped when the part about the Church was proclaimed because he did not want to accept the Church as a sinful institution. Finally, he decided to enter the catechumenate and the pastor asked him about this exactly at the same time as when he had decided to do it. He went through a one-year-long catechumenate with a new pastor. 'So the catechumenate, it is a packet of beautiful information, a kind of recognising and explaining.' During this time, all of his doubts about the Church disappeared and he received Baptism last Easter. 'So only in the catechumenate I comprehended what a Church is. I know that the Czech word is problematic, I don't know in what sense exactly. So I told myself: you are such an idiot, standing all the time before the gate...' Since then, he has joined parish life. He is an altar server, attends the prayer group with his wife and supports his wife during her other activities in the parish. He says that his relationship to the parish is more intensive after being given the church keys, as the parish would become his home. Concerning the prayer group, the respondent says, that 'coming there after having all the week's troubles behind you and all the people who want to meet are there and there is no forcing and they really want to concentrate, be silent and be held on a wave of silence and harmony. In the church, it should not be like this, the Mass is just different. I don't know why people live their faith without it but I perceive it as a great thing and wonder why so few parishioners attend the group.'

Both respondents see the parish pastor as an engine without which the parish cannot work properly. They have the experience of the past ten years where two pastors with a charismatic type of religiosity were responsible for the parish and have succeeded in involving the people in various activities. The ideal parish, according to them, is a community with a pastor in the centre who gives the right motivation to the parishioners to improve their gifts or talents and use it for ministry in the parish.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show one of the first pieces of empirical research on a parish from the perspective of practical theology in the Czech Republic. The first part has focused on the Magisterium's teaching on the parish after the Second Vatican Council, which finds it still very important, especially for evangelisation and Church renewal. A parish is seen as the Church in its fullness, but it must be in harmony with the diocese and the whole universal Church. Emphasis is also placed upon the cooperation between a parish pastor and the lay members. The parish is theologically a communion, being the key concept of the Second Vatican Council and the time since. Even if we lack special systematic theology regarding the parish, we can use general ecclesiology.

The emerging results from the ethnographic research show that the explored parish has been influenced by the work of its last two pastors and is a place that realises the functions of the Church relatively well. It also has a slightly increasing number of believers, who can choose to be part of smaller groups inside the parish for sharing the faith and prayers. The active core of the parish takes advantage of these groups and the pastor is looking for new ways to attract more people. However, religious education or catechesis is not sufficient, and the parish also lacks an economic council like the majority of the Czech parishes, including those in the diocese of the parish. These areas are not sufficiently reflected upon even theoretically in Czech practical theology.

## Literature

- AMBROS, P.: *Pastorální teologie. 2.*, přeprac. vyd. Olomouc : Univerzita Palackého, 2002.
- BREWER, J. D.: *Ethnography*. Buckingham : Open University Press, 2000.
- HOJDA, J.: *Farnost na přelomu století: teologická reflexe*. Svitavy : Trinitas, 2000.
- DULLES, A.: *Models of the church*. New York : Doubleday, 2002.
- FIORINZA, F. S., GALVIN, J. P. (ed.): *Systematická teologie II: římskokatolická perspektiva*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 1998.
- GRAUBNER, J.: *Jak si představují farnost dnes*. Olomouc : Matice cyrilometodějská, 2005.
- HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. Praha : Portál, 2016.
- HŮLE, D.: Víra deklarovaná x realizovaná, [http://www.demografie.info/?cz\\_detail\\_clanku&artclID=161](http://www.demografie.info/?cz_detail_clanku&artclID=161)
- JUHÁS, V.: *Cirkev v medzičase: [ekleziologická studia jazykom piatich teológov: Leonardo Boff, Hans Küng, Medard Kehl, Jürgen Werbick, Jürgen Moltmann]*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2011.
- KASPER, W.: *Theologie - součást naší doby*. Praha : Česká křesťanská akademie, 1994.

- KAUFMAN, T. S.: *A New Old Spirituality? A qualitative study of Clergy Spirituality in the Nordic Context*. Eugene : Pickwick Publications, 2017.
- KEHL, M.: *Kam kráčí církev?: diagnóza doby*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2000.
- O'HALLORAN, J.: *Církev jinak: od základního společenství ke křesťanské obci*. Praha : Sít, 2006.
- NOVOTNÝ, V.: *Odvaha být církví: Josef Zvěřina v letech 1913-1967*. Praha : Karolinum, 2013.
- OPATRŇÝ, A.: *Cesty pastorační v pluralitní společnosti*. Kostelní Vydří : Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2006.
- OPATRŇÝ, A.: *Pastorační v postmoderní společnosti*. Kostelní Vydří : Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2001.
- PESCH, O. H.: *Druhý vatikánský koncil: 1962 – 1965 : příprava, průběh, odkaz*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2014.
- POSPÍŠIL, C. V.: Některé otázky spojené s ekleziologií společenství (4). In: *Teologické texty*, 4/1998.
- BENEDIKT XVI.: *Církev jako společenství*. Praha : Zvon, 1994.
- RIKHOF, H.: *The concept of church: a methodological inquiry into the use of metaphors in ecclesiology*, London : Sheed and Ward, 1981.
- ROWLAND, Ch.(ed.): *The Cambridge companion to liberation theology*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- SWINTON, J., MOWAT, H.: *Practical theology and qualitative research*. London : SCM, 2016.
- ŠÍDLOVÁ, J.: *Mystagogy: deepening the social dimension of youth's faith*. Unpublished paper.
- ŠTĚCH, F.: *Tu se jim otevřely oči: zjevení, víra a církev v teologii kardinála Avery Dullese Sj*. Olomouc : Refugium Velehrad – Roma, 2011.
- VEN, J. van der: *Practical theology: an empirical approach*. Leuven, Belgium : Peeters, 1998.
- WARD, P.: *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography*. Grand Rapids, Michigan : William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

## List of abbreviations:

- AA Apostolicam actuositatem  
 CL Christifideles Laici  
 EG Evangelii gaudium  
 (ON THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL IN TODAY'S WORLD)  
 GDC General Directory for Catechesis  
 LG Lumen gentium (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church)  
 CIC Codex iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)  
 CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church  
 SC Sacrosanctum consilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

Mgr. et Mgr. Jana Šídllová  
University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice  
Faculty of Theology  
Department of Education  
Kněžská 8  
370 01 České Budějovice  
Česká republika  
janaspana@seznam.cz