

# Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary



Blessed Marcelina Darowska

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in Rome in 1857. It emerged out of the common vision of three people: Josepha Karska, fr. Jerome Kajsiewicz (a Resurrectionist father) and Marcelina Darowska. All three were Polish, with a great love for their country and commitment to it. The first Superior of the community, which was composed of a handful of women, was Mother Josepha Karska, and, after her death (1860), she was succeeded by Marcelina Darowska (beatified in 1996, by Pope John Paul II).

In 1865, the Congregation moved to an area which, at that time, was not in Poland, as Poland had ceased to exist. From 1795, Polish territory had been divided into three parts – under the authority of Austria, Germany (Prussia) and Russia, and the Polish people fought, in various ways, to regain the independence of their country. The relocation of the Niepokalanki Sisters - this was the familiar name by which they began to be known – was only possible within the Austrian partition. They chose to settle in Jazlowiec, which is 200km from Lviv.

Once in Jazlowiec, the Sisters commenced their ministry: a boarding school for girls was established. Several generations of Polish women were educated at this school. Within a relatively short time, Mother Darowska set up more schools: in Jaroslaw, Nizniow, Nowy Sacz – all in the Austrian partition. In 1906 and 1908, it became possible to open two institutions in the Russian partition, including the convent in Szymanow, near Warsaw. There was always a school in each location, which provided education and mentoring. Mother Darowska died in 1911 and is interred at Jazlowiec. She left behind her a vigorously growing and active religious congregation with a clearly defined charism and area of apostolic ministry. Sisters worked as teachers and mentors, running schools, teaching religion lessons, organising and conducting retreats and discipling women, as well as maintaining ongoing and regular contact with alumni of their schools, who, to the present day, keep in touch with one another and the Congregation through their own association, which is called the United Friends of Jazlowiec (KZJ).



Jazlowiec convent

The communities of Sisters in the different convents experienced a variety of ups and downs during both World Wars. In the inter-war period, a number of new foundations were established, some of which are still functioning. After World War II, and the drawing of new national boundaries in Central and Eastern Europe, only a small number of our convents fell within the new Polish borders. Others ceased to exist, as they were in the territory of the USSR. This was the situation in which the Jazlowiec convent found itself, and the Sisters

were removed by the authorities in 1946. They were able to return only in 1999. Currently, Jazlowiec is located in the Ukraine.



Szymanow convent

Within Poland, the Congregation has 10 houses and 1 in the Ukraine (Jazlowiec). The Niepokalanki Sisters run three high schools, 2 primary schools, 5 kindergartens,

1 retreat house, and Sisters also teach religion, are involved in discipling women, and organise retreats and days of prayer and reflection.

From the point of the outbreak of war in the Ukraine, our Sisters have been engaged in providing help to refugees (Polish convents mainly accommodate women and children), and in assisting refugees within the Ukraine. They also seek to support the Jazlowiec convent, until very recently a retreat house, which is currently providing shelter for those fleeing from the areas of the country where the conflict is fiercest. There are approximately 70

people accommodated there – mainly women and children. This is a group forced to abandon a hostel for single mothers run by the Orionist Sisters in Kharkiv, following its destruction. There are currently 3 Niepokalanki Sisters in Jazlowiec, 3 Orionist Sisters, as well as the women and children already mentioned, and a number of other individuals and families, who are, for a longer or shorter time, seeking the protection of the convent. The community at Jazlowiec is supported by gifts and donations from generous people of good will in Poland. At Jazlowiec itself, the relief items received are unpacked and passed on to those in need of them – refugees living in nearby villages and towns, and even further afield. The Sisters are working closely with local authorities, institutions and other religious congregations. Many people have offered and provided unconditional assistance, and the huge unity and solidarity among those in the Ukraine is palpable. If war in the Ukraine continues, it will be essential to organise systematic aid and support. At the moment, one of the greatest needs is the purchase of footwear for the children being cared for at the convent, and also the provision of washing machines and freezers. From Poland, there is constant transportation of food, and cleaning and hygiene supplies (which are beginning to run out). Every convent in our Congregation is doing what is possible to support this action, as are our alumni, parents of our current students, groups associated with the 14th Jazlowiec Uhlan Regiment, and many of our friends and supporters.

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