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**ORDER OF CLERICS REGULAR
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.
CHARISM AND MISSION.**

1. St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, Founder of the New Institute

Jan Papczyński was born in 1631 in Podegrodzie, in the Sącz region, into a peasant family. He received his early education at parish schools in Podegrodzie and nearby Nowy Sącz. At the age of 15, he left home for good and continued his studies at Jesuit colleges (Jarosław, Lviv, Rawa Mazowiecka) and a Piarist college (Podolin in Spisz).

After completing his studies in Rawa Mazowiecka (rhetoric and two years of philosophy), in July 1654, Papczyński entered the Piarist novitiate. It seems that he was most drawn to their Marian devotion, their extreme poverty, and their dedication to teaching the poorest. In the order, he received the name Stanisław of Jesus and Mary, which he used for the rest of his life. In 1656, he took his simple vows, and in 1661, he was ordained a priest.

In the Piarist Order, Stanisław of Jesus and Mary became a respected professor of rhetoric (his textbook was printed four times over the course of nine years), a preacher, confessor, and spiritual director, an educator of youth, and vice-postulator for the canonization process of Joseph Calasante, the founder of the Piarists. He served, among other places, in Podolin, Rzeszów, and Warsaw.

From 1664 onward, a conflict grew between Stanisław of Jesus and Mary and the Piarist superiors, which ultimately led to Stanisław's departure from the order. The monk later published his defense (probably in 1671) in a special apologetic treatise, in which he explained the reasons for his departure: hostility on the part of the Piarist superiors; a loosening of the former monastic observance; love for the Congregation of Pious Schools and a desire for peace in the Polish Province; the inability to utilize his innate abilities^[1]. On the part of the Piarist superiors, Fr. Stanisław was accused of sedition and disobedience.

In 1669, Clement IX permitted the Piarists to renew their solemn vows instead of simple ones. Father Stanisław decided not to take solemn vows and requested to be released from the simple ones.

In a letter from around 1675, he noted that the Congregation of Pious Schools was "dearer to him than life itself" and "the most beloved," and he regarded his vocation to it as "inspired by God alone"^[2].

On December 11, 1670, Fr. Papczyński accepted the indult to leave the Piarists and immediately publicly recited his previously prepared *Oblation (Oblatio)* [3], which the Marians today recognize as their founding act. Leaving the Piarists allowed Fr. Stanislaus to found a new religious institute, centered on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and dedicated to a threefold mission. Without any exaggeration, Fr. Papczyński can today be called a prophet of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The path to the founding and approval of the new order was not, however, an easy one.

2. The Immaculate Conception of Mary, the center of St. Stanislaus' charism and of the Marian Congregation

The *Oblatio* act, pronounced by St. Stanislaus on December 11, 1670, was, without a doubt, a turning point in his life and, at the same time, the founding act of the future Order of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The saint pronounced the *Oblatio* before the same witnesses in whose presence he had, moments earlier, received the indult to leave the Piarist Order. In this way, he publicly began the path to which God Himself had directed him [4]. In the light of the *Oblatio*, one can read the entire book of Fr. Stanislaus's subsequent life.

The *Oblatio* begins: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen"; it contains four elaborate sentences and a concluding declaration: "So help me God and this holy Gospel of God." What follows are only signatures and explanations. In the first sentence, Fr. Stanisław consecrates his entire self, all that he is and all that he possesses, "to God the Almighty Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God, Mary, ever Virgin, conceived without original sin." In the second sentence, he vows chastity and submission to the rules of the "Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which I wish to establish by God's grace)." In the third sentence, he pledges obedience and poverty. In the fourth sentence, he professes faith "in everything that the Holy Roman Church believes and will in the future teach as true, and in particular I profess that the Most Holy Mother of God, Mary, was conceived without original sin, and I promise that I will spread devotion to her and defend her even at the cost of my life." It is evident that in these four sentences, the Saint refers directly to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary three times. At least since the time of *Oblatio*, this mystery had been the most important point of reference and the heart of the charism for the Founder of the Marians and for the emerging community itself.

Father Stanislaus's determination was remarkable when, in various founding documents and letters to ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries, he referred to the congregation by the title of the Immaculate Conception (*Congregatio Immacolatae Conceptionis BMV, Societas Immacolatae Conceptionis, Ordo Immacolatae Conceptionis, Congregatiuncula Immacolatae Conceptionis*), and in response he often received letters referring to the

congregation as “Mary Immaculate,” “Mary conceived without original sin,” or “the Immaculate Conception of Mary.”

Less than a year after making his *Vows of Presentation*, St. Stanislaus donned a white habit “in honor of the Immaculate Conception” (*in honorem Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Mariae Virginis*)[\[5\]](#). It was not merely a sign of religious consecration, but an outward expression of the central charism of the emerging community. Stanisław Krajewski, Fr. Papczyński’s first companion, received the name John of the Immaculate Conception in July 1673, donned a white habit, and as his religious vow “*in Societatem Immaculatae Conceptionis BMV*” recited the *Oblatio*, modeled after the one made by the Founder. At the first house of the Marian community in Puszcza Korabiewska (today Mariańska), the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and St. Michael the Archangel was established.

References to the Immaculate Conception of Mary are found in many of Fr. Stanisław’s writings, but they are most numerous in **Wejrzenie w głąb serca** (a collection of meditations on the readings for all Sundays and feasts of the liturgical year, on the Passion of the Lord, on the last things, etc.) [\[6\]](#). Regarding the Immaculate Conception, the most interesting are the meditations for the feasts of: the Purification of Mary; St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary; the Annunciation; the Visitation; the Dedication of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore; the Nativity of Mary; the Presentation of Mary; the Immaculate Conception. In the final meditation, Fr. Stanisław emphasizes that Mary was conceived without original sin, as the most perfect creature; promised already to our first parents in paradise, she remains from the very beginning an enemy of the devil; as the temple of the Trinity, she is our Help before God [\[7\]](#).

From the *Oblatio* act, as well as from the Saint’s subsequent writings, it is very clear that Fr. Stanisław understood the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary very clearly and very broadly, often ahead of his time[\[8\]](#).

A thorough study of the writings and activities of the Founding Father allows us to discern in his teaching those themes that are present in the teachings of recent popes and contemporary theologians regarding the Immaculate Conception of Mary: the mercy of God in the One Trinity; the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the merciful Savior and model of life; the Holy Spirit as Life-Giver and Sanctifier; the primacy of grace and human cooperation; the following (*sequela*) of Christ and the imitation (*imitatio*) to Jesus, Mary, and the saints; the Immaculate One as the work and temple of the Trinity; Mary, full of grace and the Holy Spirit, Mother of God and Mother of the Church; the new man, the mystical temple of God; the Church, Bride of Christ and instrument of salvation; love as the foundation of creation and redemption, the basis of every vocation and life; love and mercy toward one’s neighbor; the need to support the deceased and the dying.

Fr. Stanisław, both in his life and in his teaching, is very clearly Trinitarian and Christocentric. According to him, Mary has always stood closest to Jesus, accompanied Him, intercedes before Him, and today intercedes for all people. For the founder of the Marians, it was obvious that Christ is God-Man and Mary is His Mother and Disciple,

the most beautiful among all creatures. Fr. Stanislaus held that the order of Mary's titles is as follows: Mother of God, Virgin, Immaculate Conception. Fr. Papczyński outlined the recipe for living according to the model of the Immaculate Mary in his manual on the spiritual life, **The Mystical Temple of God**.

In his teaching, Fr. Stanisław drew extensively from Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers, the saints, and theologians. He understood the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in a very broad sense; he dedicated the Institute he founded to it and centered his life around it. Although in 17th-century Poland most Church leaders recognized the Immaculate Conception of Mary as true (though it was not yet a dogma), it was an entirely different matter to attempt to found a new, apostolic order in her honor—especially by a man of humble origins, without great wealth, influence, or powerful patrons in Rome.

3. The Order's Beginnings, Its Character, and Triple Mission

After leaving the Piarists and making his *Oblatio* in December 1670, Fr. Stanisław received various invitations and job offers from bishops and religious superiors. He rejected them all and devoted himself to founding a new religious institute.

In early September 1671, he took up residence at the noble estate of the Karski family in Lubocza (within the Diocese of Poznań) and there, before an image of Mary Immaculate, he donned a white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, with the consent of the local bishop and after having previously informed the apostolic nuncio. Within two years, Fr. Stanisław prepared two extensive writings: *The Rule of Life* and *The Mystical Temple of God*. The first document was intended for the members of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception. The second was a handbook of spiritual life “for all states.” It can be read as a kind of guide to living the Immaculate Conception for all Christians.

Everything indicates that Fr. Stanisław, educated in Jesuit and Piarist colleges (both institutes belonged to orders of the regular clergy), until recently a religious completely devoted to the apostolate, desired to found a clerical institute dedicated to prayer and pastoral ministry. Although he was regarded by many as exceptionally prudent and spiritual, even a saint, he initially could not find suitable candidates for the new order. On the advice of the superior of the Camaldolese in Bielany near Warsaw, on September 30, 1673, he joined several hermits living in a hermitage in the Korabiew Forest. He also deemed them unfit for life and apostolate in the order intended by God.

Father Stanisław's plans were severely thwarted by a bishop's visitation of the hermitage in the Korabiew Forest. On October 24, 1673, Bishop Jacek Święcicki, having deemed the life of the so-called hermits not particularly edifying, imposed disciplinary decrees upon them, mandating, among other things, strict fasting, public flagellation, strict silence, and a prohibition against leaving the cloister. He also obliged the

residents to observe the *Rule of Life* written by Fr. Papczyński, and appointed him superior of the hermitage. In this way, on the one hand, he approved and blessed the first Marian house (referred to here as the Institute of Clerics of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary); on the other hand, however, he made them hermits, contrary to the intentions of Fr. Stanisław [9]. He submitted to the bishop's orders, though his desire was for an active life devoted to pastoral ministry. By the end of 1675, all the original inhabitants of the hermitage had left it, but new companions had already begun to join Fr. Papczyński.

In 1677, the foundation of the Marians in the Korabiew Forest was approved by the Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the "Retreat House of Clerics of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The Sejm also placed "this congregation" permanently under its own and the Republic's protection [10]. That same year, at the invitation of Poznań Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski, a second house of the new religious community was established—in New Jerusalem (now Góra Kalwaria).

In the Passion sanctuary being built according to Bishop Wierzbowski's design, the Marians took charge of the so-called Cenacle. The bishop assigned specific pastoral tasks to Fr. Papczyński and his confreres: they were to lead pilgrims along the Stations of the Cross from the Cenacle in New Jerusalem, preach to them, and hear their confessions. They were also to provide spiritual care for the Dominican sisters from the nearby convent and celebrate the Eucharist for them [11].

Despite his efforts, Fr. Papczyński was unable to obtain papal approval for the new religious institute. Therefore, the founder decided to seek at least episcopal approval for the new community. This was possible for so-called "second-degree hermitic institutes" ("hermits" were understood here in a very broad sense, ranging from hermits and cenobites to communities living an apostolic life). Bishop Wierzbowski agreed to this proposal and initiated the legal procedure for the institute's approval, culminating in a decree dated April 21, 1679, erecting the new congregation. The bishop merged the foundations in the Korabiew Forest and New Jerusalem into a single institute of "hermits of the second degree," which he named the Congregation of Recollect Clerics of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The bishop took the new community under his protection, along with the future bishops of Poznań, and granted it privileges. The Marians were to be governed by their own legislation (particularly the *Rule of Life*), devote themselves to prayer for the dead (as the institute's primary purpose), and hasten to minister to those condemned to death. A penitential and ascetic character was assigned to the house in the Korabiew Forest. Bishop Święcicki's visitation regulations were no longer to apply in New Jerusalem or in subsequent Marian establishments. This opened the way for an ever-wider apostolic engagement by the Marians. Fr. Stanisław Papczyński was appointed Superior General for life [12].

Two weeks after the canonical establishment of the Marian Congregation, King John III Sobieski, in a special document, confirmed all the order's previous privileges and added new ones. He took the institute under his protection and wished it growth within the

Kingdom of Poland. He recognized the community as devoted to prayer and to supporting the souls suffering in purgatory [13].

It is worth noting that Bishop Wierzbowski informed the Holy See of the establishment of a new institute within his diocese. In response, Innocent XI recognized the bishop's legal act and granted the Marians numerous indulgences and privileges. He referred to the Marians as the Congregation (Congregation) of Recollect Clerics under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, established for the support of the faithful departed. In this way, the Marians were recognized by the pope for the first time as a community existing under diocesan law [14].

Two weeks before his death (March 6, 1687), Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski established the Marians for the second time, this time referring to them once as the Institute of Recollect Clerics of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary and another time as the Congregation of Clerics of the Immaculate Conception assisting the deceased. In the document, the bishop recounted the history of the Marians' founding, beginning with the community in the Korabiew Forest and the merits of Fr. Stanisław. He noted that the Marians take religious vows and an oath of perseverance in the congregation, from which only the Holy See can grant dispensation. He presented the *Rule of Life*, composed by Fr. Papczyński, as the law for the Marians, and proclaimed him the community's superior general for life [15].

Father Papczyński prepared the *Rule of Life* for his long-desired order as early as 1671-1673. He presented it for review to his first companion, Stanisław Krajewski, in 1673. As a result of the visitation decrees of Bishop Jacek Święcicki (1673) and changing circumstances, the *Rule of Life* certainly had to be modified. We do not know its earliest version. It was first printed in 1687 as *The Rule of Life of the Recollect Clerics of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, otherwise known as the Marians, supporting souls in purgatory, in the Kingdom of Poland*. The document itself (along with the preceding *Informative Preface*, added by Fr. Stanisław around 1698) presents the "Congregation of the Immaculate Conception" (not "Mary Immaculate") as an apostolic community, though originally established in the eremitic state. In the first chapter, the author presents two goals common to all religious orders (the increase of God's glory and concern for one's own salvation) and three specific goals of the new institute:

- spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God;
- assisting through prayer the souls suffering in purgatory, especially soldiers and those who died as a result of the plague;
- humbly assisting parish priests in their pastoral work [16].

The promotion of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary was already evident in the name of the congregation, as desired by the founder. The white habit was

intended to serve this purpose, the existence and apostolate of the religious devoted to this mystery, the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception recited or sung by them daily, the establishment of a Brotherhood of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary at every house, and the promotion of that Brotherhood. All of this was so important to Fr. Stanisław that before his death, he stipulated in his will that his successor, “under threat of God’s terrible judgment,” should not change anything regarding the habit and title of the order, or the devotion to Mary, which was expressed in the daily recitation of the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception and the entire Rosary[17]. Father Stanislaus’s motto, adopted by his confreres for all time, was: “May the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary be our salvation and protection.”

The second specific purpose of the congregation, as laid down by the founder, was prayer for the dead. Fr. Papczyński justified its necessity primarily from the Holy Scriptures. Moreover, he himself had brushed with death several times (e.g., as a teenager in Lviv) and witnessed the deaths of many people in 17th-century Poland, particularly due to wars, epidemics, and famine. Even during Fr. Stanisław’s lifetime, it was known that he often experienced visions of Purgatory and “walked” among the souls suffering after death as they awaited heaven. He urged everyone, and especially his confreres, “to pray for the dead, for they endure unbearable torments” . He called supporting the deceased in every way the most important work of mercy. He believed that anyone who could pray for the deceased but did not do so was heartless. It seems that at the beginning of the congregation, prayer for the deceased was considered by many to be the most important mission of the Marians in the Church.

As the third specific goal, Fr. Stanislaus prescribed to his confreres “assistance to parish priests.” This involved administering the sacraments, preaching retreats and missions, and teaching children, youth, and ordinary people everything that could help them on their way to heaven. During his lifetime, Fr. Papczyński was called the “Apostle of Mazovia.” Together with his companions, he also neglected no works of mercy. All this so that every person, created in the image and likeness of God and made His mystical temple through baptism, might, as a holy and spotless being, praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit both in this life and in eternity. Over time, all the specific goals of the Marians became evident in their activities and were recorded in documents. The community itself was sometimes called the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, assisting the deceased and parish priests.

Even during the founder’s lifetime, the Marians established several communities: the Korabiew Forest (today the Marian Forest), the Cenacle in New Jerusalem (today in Góra Kalwaria), Goźlin (today Mariańskie Porzecze). It appears that by the end of the 17th century, the Marians were also engaged in pastoral work at missions in Volhynia, Ruthenia, and Lithuania, often working among the Orthodox population. Reconstructing those histories today is impossible, due to the destruction of most Marian documents and sources from that time [18].

The only thing missing, and what Fr. Stanisław constantly sought, was papal approval of the religious community. The founder desired approval for the *Rule of Life* he had

written. The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) prohibited the establishment of religious communities based on new rules. It was only possible to adopt one of the existing rules and to specify the community's particular character through constitutions. There were, however, exceptions to this rule (such as the Jesuits or the Piarists), when the Holy See approved new religious orders solely on the basis of their constitutions, which also served as a rule (*constitutiones pro regula*). This was what Fr. Stanisław desired. However, he did not live in Rome, nor did he have influential relatives or powerful patrons there. Therefore, he had to follow a much more humble and lengthy path with his community.

4. Papal Approvals - Toward the Fullness of the Charism and Mission

In order to obtain papal approval for the new religious community, Fr. Papczyński set out on foot for Rome at the end of 1690. He arrived in the Eternal City after the death of Alexander VIII, who had passed away on February 1, 1691. While waiting for the election of a new pope, Fr. Stanisław made pilgrimages to the churches of Rome and secured letters of recommendation for his community from various religious orders. The climate of the Eternal City did not agree with him. Having not lived to see the election of St. Peter's successor, he returned to Poland on foot in early July 1691. Innocent XII became the new pope, elected on July 12, 1691.

In order to obtain papal approval for the Marians, in the fall of 1698 Fr. Papczyński sent his confrere Fr. Joachim Kozłowski [19]. He obtained papal approval for the Marians under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, through their incorporation into the Order of Friars Minor (September 21, 1699) under the Rule of the Ten Virtues (Preferences) of the Blessed Virgin Mary [20]. This Rule was written by Blessed Gilbert Nicolas (later known as Gabriel Maria) in 1501, at the request and under the guidance of St. Joan of France (de Valois), who founded the contemplative Order of the Most Holy Virgin Mary (the Annunciation Sisters). The Rule was approved by Alexander VI in 1502, contrary to the aforementioned decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council. The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary was confirmed several times by the popes of the 16th and 17th centuries. It was also adapted for male religious orders.

On November 24, 1699, Innocent XII issued a letter (rescript) to the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, ordering him to accept the solemn vows of the Marians [21]. Thus, the Pope approved and confirmed the Marians' aggregation to the Franciscans. Papal approval of the order was to be formalized by the taking of solemn vows to the Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which Fr. Papczyński had neither chosen nor was familiar with. After familiarizing himself with it, he approved it along with all his confreres. On June 6, 1701, before the Apostolic Nuncio in Warsaw, Fr. Stanisław, as "an unworthy superior of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Polish Congregation, Helper of the Dead and of Parish Priests," took solemn vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and committed himself to observing the Rule

of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary “insofar as it does not conflict with the regulations of our religious institute” [22]. On June 6, 1701, the Apostolic Nuncio in Warsaw confirmed in a special letter the fulfillment of Innocent XII’s rescript[23].

In July 1701, the remaining Marians took their solemn religious vows, already in the presence of their founder, who died on September 17 of that same year. Through the act of taking their vows, the Marians became not only *ipso iure* but also *ipso facto* the last religious order of the regular clergy in the Church under papal law, with solemn vows, the Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the foundation of their religious life, an exemption, and other privileges accorded to religious orders. The reference to the *Rule of Life*, written by the founder, although evident in their daily life, was not expressed in any way in the aforementioned documents of aggregation and those defining the establishment of the new order under papal law. Due to the aggregation to the Franciscan Order, in practice, the Marians’ dependence on the Franciscans began to grow increasingly evident. For the nascent community, this was initially a tremendous support. Over time, it began to become an ever-greater burden.

On September 3, 1723, Innocent XIII signed a brief in which he approved and ratified the *Statutes of the Congregation of Marian Clerics Regular Assisting the Deceased and Parish Priests in Pastoral Care*. In the text of the approval, the Pope refers to the Congregation of Marian Clerics under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary[24]. *The Statutes* were drafted based on Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński’s *Rule of Life* and adapted to the requirements of canon law. Numerous provisions were introduced indicating the congregation’s strong dependence on the Order of the Reformed Franciscans. The Marian’s apostolic character was emphasized more strongly. The term “hermits” was no longer used in reference to them. The main goals of the Congregation were slightly expanded compared to the *Rule of Life* and reorganized as follows: the increase of God’s glory; the promotion of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the imitation of her virtues according to the *Rule of the 10 Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*; striving for one’s own perfection and the salvation of one’s neighbors, especially by teaching simple people the truths of the Christian faith; assisting the deceased suffering in purgatory. Three new chapters were introduced: on Christian teaching and missions; on assisting the souls of the deceased; on prayer.

Freeing themselves from Reformist influences and achieving full independence took years. This process culminated on March 10, 1786, when Pius VI separated the Marian Order from the Franciscan Order. On March 27, 1787, the same pope approved both the Institute and the Constitutions of the Marian Clerics Regular[25]. The foundation was based on Fr. Stanislaw’s *Rule of Life* and the *Statutes* of 1723. Everything that indicated any dependence on the Reformed Order was removed. Even greater emphasis was placed on the apostolate, which was to be carried out in their own churches and parish churches[26].

5. From an Order of Regular Clerics to a Clerical Congregation

From the time of Fr. Papczyński, for over two hundred years, the most important points of reference for the Marians were the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the example of the Founding Father. This is clearly evident in the legislation, rituals, ceremonies, prayers, customs, etc., of that time. In honor of the Immaculate Conception, the Marians wore a white habit and the Scapular of the Immaculate Conception, recited the Office of the Immaculate Conception daily, renewed their vows on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, established Confraternities of the Immaculate Conception, and added special invocations to the Litany of Loreto (“Virgin conceived without sin” and “Queen of our poor Congregation”), and recited special invocations (e.g., “May the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary be our salvation and defense”; “Through your Immaculate Conception, O Mary, obtain for me purity of body and holiness of soul” ; “In Your Conception, O Immaculate Virgin, You were pure; pray for us to the Father, whose Son You bore”), etc. In fulfilling their mission, they desired to become holy and spotless before the face of God. The newly elected general, kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, vowed to defend and spread the devotion to the Immaculate Conception and to be obedient to the Rule and the Holy See.

At the beginning of the 20th century, due to over a century of unceasing persecution (culminating in the suppression of the order in 1864), the Marian Order seemed to be inevitably heading toward extinction. In 1909, the last Marian, General Vincent Sękowski, remained at the monastery in Mariampol, ready to prepare two coffins: one for himself and one for his order. However, God’s plans were different. Blessed George Matulewicz, a priest of the Diocese of Kielce born near Mariampol, with the consent of the Holy See, saved the order from extinction, renewed it, and reformed it, giving it a new character and new goals. In 1910, Pius X approved the new Constitutions. After numerous changes and adaptations to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, in 1930, Pius XI approved the subsequent Constitutions of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary [\[27\]](#).

In accordance with the aforementioned Constitutions (of 1910 and 1930), the Marians transformed from a religious order with solemn vows and a habit into a clerical congregation without a habit and with simple vows. The *Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary* ceased to be in force. The primary specific tasks became education, self-improvement, and sanctification—both personal and of God’s people—while the promotion of the devotion to the Immaculate Conception and prayer for the dead were recognized as particular forms of piety (more individual than communal). Blessed George Matulewicz himself admitted that he had inherited only the name from the old Marians, and that everything else had to be reformulated [\[28\]](#).

Fr. Matulewicz, thanks to whom Fr. Stanislaus’s institute was saved, became—already during his lifetime and even more so after his death—the most important figure in the history of the Congregation for many Marians. In the mid-20th century, some Marians regarded him outright as their founder, while they treated Fr. Papczyński as a relic of the past, having nothing to say to modern man.

The encouragement of the Church's Magisterium, especially since the Second Vatican Council, served as a positive impetus for the Marians to embark on a new search and rediscovery of their own identity, charism, and spirituality, as well as their own founder as a father and source of inspiration. In the *Constitutions and Directory*, adapted to the 1983 Code of Canon Law and promulgated and published in 1988, a certain return to the founding charism was already evident, along with an emphasis on the central place of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception for the identity and spirituality of the Marians[29].

The significance of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary for the Marians and the world, as well as its central place in the charism of the Congregation, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, increasingly permeated the consciousness of the spiritual sons of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński. In this charism, one recognized not only Mariological, eschatological, and apostolic elements, but also Trinitarian, Paschal, ecclesial, biblical, spiritual, protological, charitological, and many others.

The search for a renewed synthesis and understanding of the charism was intensified in an extraordinary way by God's own intervention—through the miracles accepted in the beatification and canonization processes of St. Stanislaus. The first miracle (the resurrection of a stillborn fetus) reflects with extraordinary intensity the splendor of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The second miracle (the healing of a terminally ill woman during the Easter Triduum) is a reflection of the mystery of Christ's Paschal Mystery (His Passion, Death, and Resurrection). These are miracles that emphatically point to the dignity and sanctity of every human life, from conception to natural death.

In the process of discovering the identity of the Marians (the founder, charism, and mission), the beatification (2006) and canonization (2016) of Fr. Papczyński. Representatives of the Church made an important contribution, but even more significant was the contribution of the Marians themselves—through various discussions and publications, exploring the significance of the Immaculate Conception in history and today, resolutions of conventions and chapters, and amendments to the Constitutions.

The culmination of the reflection on the Congregation's charism and the role of St. Stanislaus Papczyński was the *Constitutions and Directory*, adopted at the 2017 Chapter and promulgated in 2018. The Immaculate Conception of Mary, as the heart of our charism, was presented in a comprehensive and beautiful manner, in line with contemporary theological thought and the teachings of recent popes[30].

The first part of the Constitutions, *Patrimony and Spirituality of the Congregation*, which contains the most important references to the Marian charism, underwent the most significant changes and additions. Following the first section, concerning the nature and place of the Congregation within the Church (an apostolic community of clergy and religious brothers under pontifical law), a second section was introduced addressing the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary as the essence of the

charism. In the third section, more than a century after Fr. Matulewicz's reform, the Congregation returned to its original mission, which had been present in its life and legislation from its founding until 1910. In accordance with the changes to the third article of the Constitutions, the first article of the Directory *Ministry and Works* was reformulated. This can be considered a "new revolutionary renewal" .

The very structure of the first part of the Constitutions promulgated in 2018 clearly reveals the central place of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception in the life and mission of the Marians. From a very broad understanding of this mystery, the charism, and religious life as such, come the sections on the Trinity, on Jesus Christ, and on the Holy Spirit (cf. *Constitutions* 4-6). Mary Immaculate, the first redeemed, is for the Marians a model and Helper in building up the Church and in serving the living and the dead (cf. *Constitutions* 7-9). The Marians, both in their spiritual life and in their apostolate, seek to promote the mystery of the Immaculate Conception throughout the world, including through their distinctive characteristics and external signs, in accordance with the entire tradition of the Congregation (cf. *Constitutions* 10-15); they venerate in a special way Mary Immaculate, the blessed and the Marian saints (above all their founder).

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary has become, in the revised *Constitutions*, a point of reference for the life, piety, mission, and legislation of the Congregation. It has also been appropriately incorporated into the formula of religious vows (cf. *Constitutions* 192) . In various places in the *Constitutions*, St. Stanislaus Papczyński is referred to for the first time as "our Father" or "our Founder."

The insights discovered by some must eventually be assimilated by all. They should also be reflected in the life and mission of the Marians, in the prayers, rites, traditions, and specific books of the Congregation. This process has already begun, but much still lies ahead. Each of us, and each of those who will come, is to find his place in the Congregation's charismatic mission and fulfill the task entrusted to him by God.

Today, the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, although no longer a religious order of regular clergy but a clerical congregation (approximately 500 members in 19 countries), remains faithful to its founder and its origins in terms of charism, character, and mission. In doing so, it draws abundantly from its own history and from the teachings of the Church to respond ever more effectively to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and to the challenges of the present day.

The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is for the Marians the center of their charism, a source of joy, hope, and apostolic zeal. The three fundamental goals—veneration of the Immaculate Conception, care for the deceased, and the apostolate to the living—find new forms of expression today, just as they have throughout history. The work inspired by the Holy Spirit in Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński is alive, enduring, and bearing fruit.

[1] Cf. S. Papczyński, *Apologia for Leaving the Order of Pious Schools*, in: S. Papczyński, *Collected Writings*, Warsaw 2017 [hereinafter: *Collected Writings*], pp. 1424-1453.

[2] S. Papczyński, *The Founding of the House of Recollection*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 1455-1456.

[3] S. Papczyński, *The Offering of Oneself*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 1421-1423.

[4] The saint confessed: “Divine Majesty suggested to me immediately before my release that—when I am released from these [vows]—in the same act I should voluntarily commit myself to God in another way, which I did through an offering [of myself] spoken from the heart, publicly [...] The divine vision, which was engraved in my soul and concerned the founding of this Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, having rejected everything [...], compelled me toward its goal” (S. Papczyński, *The Founding of the House of Recollection*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 1456, 1458).

[5] In the *Rule of Life*, intended for the Marianists, Fr. Stanislaus explicitly stated that their attire should be entirely “white in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, which shines with whiteness” (S. Papczyński, *Rule of Life*, in: *Collected Writings*, p. 59).

[6] While still with the Piarists, Fr. Stanislaus included passages on the Immaculate Conception in his rhetoric textbook *The Herald of the Queen of the Arts*. After leaving the Piarists, he published a manual on the spiritual life, *The Mystical Temple of God**, two collections of Passion meditations (*The Crucified Orator** and *The Suffering Christ**), and the aforementioned *A Glimpse into the Depths of the Heart**. All works and documents written by Fr. Stanisław are available in *Collected Writings**.

[7] Cf. S. Papczyński, *A Glimpse into the Depths of the Heart*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 946-949.

[8] It is regrettable to note that even today, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is very often reduced to one of the privileges of the Mother of God, and the devotion to the Immaculate Conception is reduced to Marian devotion. St. Stanislaus was free from this kind of reductionism and erroneous understanding of the mystery. St. John Paul II said: “The dogma of the Immaculate Conception can be described as a wonderful doctrinal synthesis of the Christian faith. In fact, it contains within itself the fundamental truths of revelation” (*Angelus*, December 8, 1988). Such teaching is now widespread among popes and theologians. However, it is slowly making its way into ordinary pastoral care.

[9] Cf. J. Święcicki, *Akta wizytacji kanonicznej* of October 24, 1673, in: *Posnanien. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Stanislai a Iesu Maria Papczyński fundatoris Clericorum Regularium Immaculatae Conceptionis B .M. V. (+1701), Positio*

super introductione causae et super virtutibus ex officio concinnata, Romae 1977 [hereinafter: *Positio*], pp. 341-345.

[10] Cf. Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, *Approval of the Foundation* dated April 27, 1677, in: *Positio*, p. 378.

[11] Cf. S. Wierzbowski, *Foundation Act* dated November 22, 1677, in: *Positio*, pp. 381-382.

[12] Cf. S. Wierzbowski, *First Establishment of the Congregation* of April 21, 1679, in: *Positio*, pp. 394-400.

[13] Cf. Jan III Sobieski, *Privilege* of June 2, 1679, in: *Positio*, pp. 402-404.

[14] Cf. Innocent XI, *Cum sicut accepimus* of March 20, 1681, in: *Positio*, pp. 406-409.

[15] Cf. S. Wierzbowski, *Second Erection of the Congregation* of February 21, 1687, in: *Positio*, pp. 422-430.

[16] Cf. S. Papczyński, *Rule of Life*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 41-75.

[17] Cf. S. Papczyński, *Second Testament*, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 1494-1501.

[18] Cf. J. Kosmowski, *The Marians 1670-1788: From Hermitage to Evangelization*, Warsaw 2020, pp. 61-65, 108-109.

[19] Kozłowski took with him letters of recommendation from Bishop Hieronim Wierzbowski, administrator of the Diocese of Poznań, as well as from other ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries. In these documents, the Marians were referred to as the Congregation of Clerics of the Immaculate Conception, supporting the deceased and parish priests in their pastoral work, especially in teaching the people the fundamentals of the faith. The veneration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was mentioned. The holiness of the founder was emphasized, as well as the usefulness and necessity of the Marians and their apostolate in the Church and in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Cf. *Positio*, pp. 519-537.

[20] Cf. *Agregacja* of September 21, 1699, in: *Positio*, pp. 540-542.

[21] Cf. Innocent XII, Letter *Exponi Nobis nuper* of November 24, 1699, in: *Positio*, pp. 544-546.

[22] Cf. S. Papczyński, *Profession of Solemn Vows* of June 6, 1701, in: *Collected Writings*, pp. 1503-1504.

[23] Cf. Franciszek Pignatelli, *Attestatio* of June 6, 1701, in: *Positio*, pp. 556-557.

[24] See Innocent XIII, *Approval and Ratification of the Statutes of the Congregation of Marian Clerics Regular Serving the Deceased and Parish Priests in Pastoral Ministry*, September 3, 1723, in: *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 2018 [hereinafter *Constitutions*], pp. 39-41.

[25] Cf. Pius VI, *Apostolic Approval of Both the Institute and the Constitutions of the Marian Clerics Regular* of November 17, 1786, in: *Constitutions*, pp. 42-45.

[26] Cf. *Constitutiones Apostolicae Ordinis Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae Clericorum Regularium Marianorum Regulae Decem Virtutum Ejusdem Mariae Concilio Tridentino Summorum Pontificum Decretis Conformes*, Rome 1787.

[27] Cf. *Institutum Fratrum Marianorum sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*, St. Petersburg 1910; *Constitutiones Congregationis Clericorum Regularium Marianorum sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*, Rome 1930

[28] Cf. J. Matulewicz, *Spiritual Diary*, 27; J. Matulewicz, *Letter to Antoni Staniukynas* dated February 8, 1912.

[29] Cf. *Constitutions of the Congregation of Marian Priests of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 1988; *Directory of the Congregation of Marian Priests of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 1988.

[30] Cf. *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 2018.