



# Day of the Righteous: Celebrating Polish nuns who saved Jews during Holocaust

01.04.2025 | Tomasz Zielenkiewicz

**March 6 marks the European Day of the Righteous, remembering and celebrating those who risked their lives in the 20th century to oppose totalitarian regimes.**

"Exactly 2,345 religious sisters from various congregations helped the Jewish population," said Sister Monika Kupczewska of the Congregation of the Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. She added that the rescue efforts came from congregations all over Poland. "The largest number, 56 communities, belonged to the Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary. However, many other congregations were also involved in this assistance," she explained.

Love for God and their fellow human beings inspired these religious sisters to save Jews. "These sisters said that this was their only motivation. No one forced them to help," emphasized Sister Kupczewska. Many of the sisters did not consider their actions to be extraordinary. They "modestly said: 'We did nothing exceptional. We could not help but save these children when faced with the cruelty of World War II,'" she recalled.

Research conducted by the Historical Commission in Poland has made the creation of a map detailing the rescue efforts possible. It marks the convents and institutions that were involved in saving Jews. These included the Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary, the Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Albertine Sisters, the Daughters of Charity, the Felician Sisters, and the Ursuline Sisters.

"There was no religious congregation in Poland that did not, in some way, encounter the question of aiding Jews during the occupation," Sister Kupczewska quoted the words of Auschwitz survivor Władysław Bartoszewski, a historian and activist.

## **An example of heroism: Przemyśl**

One example of the heroic efforts of the sisters is the story of the Sacred Heart Sisters in Przemyśl. "In our case, it was an orphanage where the sisters saved thirteen Jewish children," said Sister Kupczewska.

"Sometimes parents came and asked for help, sometimes children were left at convent doors, and sometimes older children escaped from the ghetto," she added. The sisters not only provided shelter but also took action to protect them from German persecution. "They saved the children by changing their names, forging new documents, and even disguising them in religious habits," said Sister Kupczewska.

## **The price of heroism**

Unfortunately, not all rescue efforts were successful. Twelve religious sisters paid the highest price - the price of their own lives - for aiding Jews. Four of them have been beatified by the Catholic Church as martyrs.

## First English-language monograph on clergy assistance in Poland

The Abraham J. Heschel Center for Catholic-Jewish Relations at the Catholic University of Lublin published the first English-language monograph examining how the Polish clergy assisted the Jews during the Holocaust as part of their documentation work.

The two-volume work, titled *Wartime Rescue of Jews by the Polish Catholic Clergy*, was written by attorney Ryszard Tyndorf and published by KUL Press. It is available for free online at <https://tiny.pl/s8xxn5vc>.

Throughout more than 1,200 pages, the book recounts testimonies of Jews rescued by religious sisters and priests in Poland during the Holocaust. It also includes an index listing thousands of towns and the names of both survivors and rescuers.

Source: [Vatican News](#), 06 March 2025.