

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SPLIT-MAKARSKA

Abstract

Immersion of the Church in a particular cultural context and social life is a specific way of spreading the Kingdom of God on earth. If it was not recognized in the concrete social life and did not seek to gain social relevance, the Christian faith would turn into self-sufficiency and an emphasized subjectivism. Taking into consideration the needed social incarnation of Christian faith as one of its essential elements, this paper aims to explore, present and analyse the engagement of Religious Education (RE) teachers in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska in order to evaluate their role in modern society. Divided into three parts, this paper deals with the social sensitivity, awareness and involvement of RE teachers into various fields of social life. In the first part of the paper, the authors describe of the lay faithful's position and role throughout history and their mission in the Church and in society on the basis of the Conciliar documents. The second part focuses on the role of RE teacher as an outstanding layperson in modern society. The third part provides the survey findings referring to a concrete engagement of RE teachers in extracurricular activities at their schools i.e. in different areas of life such as culture, social work, political life and the media, according to personal preferences. The authors applied theological-pastoral approach and the Web-based survey.

Key words: layperson, religious education teacher, social engagement, Archdiocese of Split-Makarska.

Introduction

This work focuses on the social engagement of RE teachers in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska and the perspective in the different areas of social and public life. The issue of the Catholic laity was dealt with at the Second Vatican Council which, contemplating about the Church, starts from its mystery that calls up all members of the mystical body of Christ to actively participate in the mission and the shaping of God's

people, according to the gifts and ministries entrusted to them. This call echoes in various initiatives, attempts and efforts made in order to follow the guidelines outlined in the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents.

The engagement of the lay faithful in Croatia was abruptly interrupted after World War II and forcibly hampered almost fifty years. The fall of the communist regime and the democratic changes in the nineties had impact on many previously banned Church activities which began to renew such as the integration of religious education in the educational system of the Republic of Croatia. It is to highlight that despite all the difficulties, the Catholic Church responded to this challenge successfully due to the integration of religious education and upbringing into the contemporary Croatian society. A considerable number of 219 RE teachers have been employed in the primary and secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska, in the academic year 2016/2017. They contribute to the growth of ardent Catholic faithful in the local church.

In order to make their faith visible and recognizable along with the call of the laity to live in the world and permeate it as a leaven of the Gospel spirit, RE teachers of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska seek to contribute both to their parishes and the wider community through their profession of teaching and engagement in extracurricular activities. This article presents their endeavours and offers new perspectives on enhancing their contribution to the local Church.

1. The role and mission of the lay faithful in the Church

A *layperson* is an ambiguous concept¹ because it denotes both to an active Christian faithful and a person without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject. In the Church, a *layperson* is defined as a member of the People of God who neither belongs to the sacred order nor the clergy, but through the baptism and the universal priesthood participates in the mission of the Church.² Obviously, it conveys different meanings in different contexts. However, due its historical and theological grounds, the meaning of the word *layperson* in the ecclesial and theological discourses is clear and unambiguous.

In the whole of its two-thousand-year history, the Church evaluated the role and mission of the lay faithful which were often neglected and marginalized due to the precedence of the hierarchy over the laity and the hierarchical vision of the Church. It was only in the 20th century, after the Second Vatican Council, when the Church's awareness of the role and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in society thoroughly

¹ Cf. B. Klaić, *Rječnik stranih riječi*, Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1988, p. 780-781.

² Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), 31 (hereinafter: GS).

changed. For the sake of better understanding, a brief overview of the role of laity in the past was presented, followed by the Conciliar teaching on the laity.

1.1. A brief overview of the role of laity in the past

The early Church that was established on the day of Pentecost and grounded its faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, was unfamiliar with a clergy-laity distinction. The early Church believed that its constitution was the work of God. It is evident through many names it was given: the People of God (1Pt 2:9-10), a holy people of God (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 2:11; 10:14), and God's chosen people (Rom 1:7; Col 3:12; 1Pt 1:2). Having realized itself in the past as the community, the Church should have been organized. Thus, first presbyters appeared in the Church (Acts 11:30, 20, 17:28; James 5:14; 1Pt 5:1; Tit 1:5-7), followed by hierarchical degrees of priesthood and services: deacons, priests and bishops. They have made the Church a stable institution throughout the time (cf. Pastoral Letters).

This process coincided with the distinction between the two linguistic items the *cleric* and the *layperson* that were first mentioned by Clement of Rome, whereas Tertullian wrote about the Church government that introduced the division between *clergy* and *people*. This division was greatly supported by Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria and St. John Chrysostom.³ Over time, it grew into a gap between the clergy and laity that led to a gradual weakening of the role of the lay faithful in the Church. It resulted in the two types of the Church memberships: one devoted to God and the other dealt with secular issues⁴. Thus, the priesthood performs all sacred ministries associated with wisdom, education, spirituality, devotion, the sacred liturgy and ecclesiastical authority, whereas the laity was regarded as bearer of sinful human weakness and it was entrusted less important secular issues to deal with.⁵

The gap continued throughout the Middle Ages when the Christian faith became a privileged religion of the new European nations and states which, unfortunately experienced forced conversion to Christianity. Since, the Church was a powerful social force in the medieval time, pagans that were baptized overnight became members of the Church and citizens of a Christianized society due to their mere assimilation and socialization. Thus, it is quite understandable that only priests were considered genuine Christians because people that were not adequately initiated into the

³ Cf. Y.-M. Congar, *Jalons pour une theologie laicat*, Paris, 1953, p. 27, cited in: J. Jukić, *Vjernici laici u hrvatskoj Crkvi – I.*, *Bogoslovska smotra*, 70 (2000) 3-4, p. 830.

⁴ Cf. T. Ivančić, *Uloga laika u Crkvi prema II. vaticanskom saboru*, *Crkva u svijetu*, 13 (1978) 1, p. 8.

⁵ Cf. J. Jukić, *Vjernici laici u hrvatskoj Crkvi*, p. 830.

faith often believed in magic and superstition, and expressed their faith and adherence to the Church through a mere outward obedience to hierarchy. This led to a loss of the privilege that the laity had been given, and due to the increasing involvement of the clergy in the secular world, the role of the laity in the Church became quite insignificant.

The tragic breakdown of religious unity, which the Church experienced during the Reformation, was a kind of rebellion of a disempowered laity against the spiritual and secular power of the clergy. In fact, the Reformation emerged as a reaction against hierarchy and went to the other extreme, restoring the laity's mission within the Church. Moreover, it motivated the lay leaders to become as relevant as the Church, imposing themselves as important protagonists in the fight against the Reformation. Since the Protestant Reformation put the lay faithful in the center of its reform, the Council of Trent was the reply of the Catholics to the ongoing Reformation and it insisted on the consolidation of the Church as well as on the spiritual and theological renewal of the clergy. Consequently, the clergy felt fear and caution to entrust certain ministries or authorities to the laity because their mission in the Church was considered as an indirect submission to Protestantism. Thus, historical reasons of the centuries-long mistrust of the Catholic Church towards the laity should be sought in it.⁶

Although during the history of the Church, some theologians and ecclesiastical dignitaries opposed to the subordinate role of the laity and emphasized their belonging to the Church, unfortunately their efforts did not result in an important change of attitude towards the laity "who remained a necessary evil in the Church, its funding source and obedient children without the right to vote".⁷ This gap and the polarization between clergy and laity lasted for centuries, until the Second Vatican Council, due to the social and political circumstances and difficulties that affected the Church and especially because of the symbiotic relationship between temporal and spiritual.

1.2. Conciliar teaching on the laity

The Second Vatican Council is the central event for the Catholic Church in the 20th century since its changes referred to the overall reconstruction of theological thinking and church life. Due to the Council, the Church started to open to the modern world through a dialogue and at the same time it has undergone internal renewal at all levels. Due to its importance, the Second Vatican Council represents today "a guiding prin-

⁶ Cf. J. Jukić, *Vjernici laici u hrvatskoj Crkvi*, p. 831.

⁷ T. Ivančić, *Uloga laika u Crkvi prema II. vaticanskom saboru*, p. 9.

ciple for the current manifestations of the Church which, as everlasting task, requires a decisive continuity at the present time”.⁸

One of its tasks certainly refers to the fulfillment of the role and mission of the lay faithful in line with the guidelines of the conciliar documents. Contemplating on the role of the laity in the Church, the Council refers to the image of the Church as the mystical body of Christ⁹, which renders the same dignity, but also various functions of its members. All conciliar documents deal with the laity, especially the fourth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*¹⁰ and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*¹¹ that define the role and mission of the laity within the Church community.

The lay faithful are specifically characterized by their secular nature because they live in the world and deal with temporal affairs, but they do that as Christians. The presence of the laity in the world refers primarily to their faithful testimony and commitment in the world in which they live. “They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and love”.¹²

Furthermore, the Council repeatedly emphasizes the same dignity of all members of the Church who make up a people of God. Since all the faithful are members of the same Body of Christ, they share the same dignity which is based on the equality of all people due to their same human nature, but also all those who are baptized in Christ are equal. “Thus, there is no inequality in Christ and in the Church with regard to the origin and nationality, social status or gender, because “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11)”.¹³

The lay faithful have become sharers in the priestly, prophetic and the royal office of Christ through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation from which they derive the right and duty of proclaiming the good news to all people throughout the world so that they have the opportunity

⁸ N. A. Ančić, *Kako danas čitati i razumijevati Drugi vatikanski sabor*, Bogoslovska smotra, 75 (2005) 3, p. 667-686.

⁹ “Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another.” (Rom 12:4-5).

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), [hereinafter: LG].

¹¹ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (28 November 1965), [hereinafter: AA].

¹² LG, 31.

¹³ LG, 32.

to know the Gospel and accept Jesus Christ.¹⁴ This duty becomes a far more extensive in those places and circumstances where, only through the laity, the Church can become the salt of the earth.¹⁵ Therefore, the Council points out that “For besides intimately linking the laity to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”.¹⁶ The Council also states that Jesus Christ continually fulfills His prophetic office not only through the hierarchy, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and proclaimers of the word of God so that “the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life”.¹⁷ Referring to the Kingdom of God and the king’s service, the Council points out that the lay faithful are called by the Lord to spread His kingdom. They do it due to their “competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, (...) by human labor, technical skill and civic culture”.¹⁸

Through the power of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation all lay faithful, living authentic Christianity and aligning their profession with their religious beliefs, contribute to the internal and external growth of the Church. However, the Second Vatican Council discerns this common apostolate from the apostolate of the Hierarchy, i.e. the capacity of the laity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions.¹⁹ The mandate for such lay apostolate requires special licensing by the local bishop because the entrusted ministry should be carried out on behalf of the Church.

The relationship between the laity and the hierarchy should be built and developed in the spirit of family relationships enriched with their mutual giving and receiving. The lay faithful have the right to receive the spiritual goods from the shepherds of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments. They are also invited to respond to the call of the shepherds of the Church trustworthily and participate actively in the Church’s services offering their advices and opinions to the shepherds, praying for them and providing them material support. On the other hand, the shepherds are invited to promote

¹⁴ Cf. AA, 2-3.

¹⁵ Cf. LG, 33.

¹⁶ LG, 34.

¹⁷ LG, 35.

¹⁸ LG, 36.

¹⁹ Cf. LG, 33.

the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church, to rely on their prudent advices, confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church and allowing them freedom and room for action so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative.²⁰

Based on the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican Council II, *synodality* encompasses: the secular nature and dignity of the lay faithful; their share in the universal priesthood and the call for their cooperation and co-responsibility in the Church's mission. Vatican II was the beginning of a greater synodal understanding of Church and promotion of a synodal culture. The Council clearly noted that the centuries-old superiority of monologue over dialogue should be changed. Synodality denotes a specific ecclesial style, a strengthening and deepening of appreciation of the Church's hierarchical principle by underlining all aspects of ecclesial life and the contribution of all members of the People of God that promote greater participation in the life and activity of the Church.²¹ Synodality serves as a necessary correction, enriching accompaniment, an expression of relational thinking that allows the faithful to experience the ecclesial community as their spiritual homeland in which they all try to answer the question of the Gospel living in today's world.²²

2. Religious education teacher in contemporary society

In the light of the conciliar thinking and the guidelines on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church, it is possible to evaluate and define the vocation and mission of religious education teachers. Catholic religious education teachers are employed in primary and secondary schools in Croatia and represent a new category of the laity in the Church. During the communist regime, the clergy could carry out their ministry only within their Church buildings and since their public activities were prohibited, thus the role of the laity was neglected too. Regardless of the past twenty-five years of freedom, the potential and participation of the laity have not been fully realized. As believers and public figures, they can contribute to the common good of their people, but it seems that their potential is still invisible and underused, and as such represents a hidden treasure that should be revealed, supported and focused on the good of the Church and the Croatian people.²³

²⁰ Cf. LG, 37.

²¹ Cf. N. Vranješ, *Ostvarivanje sinodalnog stila pastoralnog djelovanja na župnoj razini. Djelovanje kao autentičan izričaj zajedništva Crkve*, Bogoslovska smotra 80 (2010) 4, p. 1232.

²² Cf. N. Bižaca, *Sinodalnost preduvjet uspjeha nove evangelizacije*, Crkva u svijetu, 47 (2012) 3, p. 297-298.

²³ Cf. S. Baloban, *Vjernici laici: neiskorišten društveni i crkveni potencijal u Hrvatskoj*, Bogoslovska smotra, 82 (2012) 4, p. 1027-1028.

The lay faithful and especially those theologically educated are challenged by their manifold apostolates both in the Church and in society. They are called to cope with the issues, values, unrests, hopes, victories and defeats²⁴ that affect their lives and renew “the Christian fabric of human society”.²⁵ Regardless of all the difficulties and challenges of contemporary society, the lay faithful and especially RE teachers are called to live in this world being their vineyard, a field in which they are called to live their apostolate, and there they must be the salt of the earth and light of the world.²⁶

2.1. RE teachers in the life of the parish and the local Church

Due to their theological and catechetical education and ecclesial mission of transmitting the faith in schools, RE teachers should be the most distinguished and the most engaged lay faithful in the local Church. In addition to their teaching profession, they are also invited to participate in the life of the parish community because without their participation “the apostolate of the shepherds, in most cases is not fully effective”.²⁷ Therefore, the laity entrusted by the canonical mandate of the Church, should be aware of the meaning of their apostolate in the parish community, and especially of their role in flourishing of the ecclesial communion which finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish.²⁸

One of the important tasks of RE teachers is to promote partnership of the school and parish communities. RE teachers as ambassadors of the Church and school employees are called to contribute to the coordination of various activities between the school and the parish community, especially in connecting students, parents, teachers and the pastor; introducing students to the life of the parish community and encouraging their participation and active involvement. They can participate in a wide range of activities such as e.g. reading, singing, editing of parish newsletter or running a parish website, membership in the parish pastoral council or in the parish economic council; coordination of the charity program, catechetical instruction, religious celebrations, prayer, charity or in other evangelization efforts.²⁹

Religious education in schools provides the parish community access to the public space and effective pastoral work in a school as one of the

²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), KS, Zagreb, 1990, 3 [hereinafter: CL].

²⁵ CL, 34.

²⁶ Cf. CL, 3.

²⁷ AA, 10.

²⁸ Cf. CL, 25-27.

²⁹ Cf. Hrvatska biskupska konferencija, *Za život svijeta, Pastoralne smjernice za apostolat vjernika laika u Crkvi i društvu u Hrvatskoj*, Glas Koncila, Zagreb, 2012, 94-110.

most important places of the first evangelization.³⁰ Since the school is an important place for instruction and on the basis of principle of dialogue and different areas of human knowledge, the Church can actively participate in the formation of man and the world in which we live. So, religious education promotes the vision of the Church which is the subject matter of all documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, and refers to the integration of religion into contemporary society and the integration of modern culture and social life into religious theory and practice.³¹

In addition to their engagement in the parish community, RE teachers are called to extend their activities to the diocesan, inter-diocesan, national and international field and to participate in the work of various diocesan councils and diocesan synods, etc. In this context, the Episcopal Conferences are called to evaluate “the most oportune way of developing the consultation and the collaboration of the lay faithful, women and men, at a national or regional level, so that they may consider well the problems they share and manifest better the communion of the whole Church”.³²

All the faithful are invited and obliged to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state³³ in order to contribute, with their life and work, to the growth of the whole Church. In addition to the apostolate exercised by the individual-which flows from a truly Christian life,³⁴ the ecclesial communion, which is already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful’s working together in groups, i.e. in their responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church. Forming of the lay associations reflects how great is the capacity and the generosity of the lay people as well as the diversity of their initiatives and objectives through which they participate in the renewal of the Church and society. This formation itself expresses the social nature of the person, but, above all, in a secularized world, the lay associations can represent for many a precious help for the Christian life in remaining faithful to the demands of the Gospel and to the commitment to the Church’s mission and the apostolate.³⁵

2.2. RE teacher in society and culture

The role and apostolate of the laity, Christ’s faithful, members of God’s people who participate in the mission of the Church and are co-responsi-

³⁰ Cf. Hrvatska biskupska konferencija, Nacionalni katehetski ured, Župna kateheza u obnovi župne zajednice, Plan i program, Nacionalni katehetski ured Hrvatske biskupske konferencije – Hrvatski institut za liturgijski pastoral, Zagreb – Zadar, 2000, 100-102.

³¹ Cf. Š. Marasović, *Vjeroučitelj i vrednote hrvatskog društva*, Kateheza, 30 (2008) 3, p. 185.

³² CL, 25.

³³ Cf. GS, 42.

³⁴ Cf. CL, 28.

³⁵ Cf. CL, 29.

ble for the world in which they live is not primarily to establish and develop the ecclesial community, but to focus their evangelizing efforts to the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, the world of culture, the sciences and the arts, international relations, the mass media as well as other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, human suffering, etc.³⁶

As all Christ's faithful, so RE teachers are called to witness to the faith which is the only true answer to the problems and objectives of man and society. Having received the responsibility of manifesting to the world the mystery of God that shines forth in Jesus Christ, the Church is made the "servant of all the people". In her the lay faithful should participate in the mission of service to the person and society, through revealing one person to another, a sense of one's existence, the truth about each person's final destiny.³⁷ But this will be possible only if the unity of the Church is accomplished, if the lay faithful advocate for the dignity of every person, human rights, especially the right to life and religious freedom, and if they promote family life and participate actively in politics and culture.

Due to their secular character which obliges them to the Christian animation of temporal order, the lay faithful are called to participate in the Church's serving to human person and society.³⁸ In the modern world in which everything is measured through success and efficiency, in which human relations are increasingly determined by a principle "give in order to receive", Christians are required to provide volunteer service especially to the needed, and to warn about the fact that people live rather of what they have received, than of what they have deserved.³⁹

Therefore, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life", that is, in economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. In fact, no area of life should be disregarded by the lay faithful's participation and the mission of the New Evangelization. It is necessary to evangelize a broad and complex world of policies, to respect the autonomy of earthly realities, to serve the people taking the burden of respective responsibilities. The lay faithful should not be discouraged by the criticism, but should strive to the political power imbued with a spirit of service, the required competence and responsibility, so that their action is really transparent and clear as it is expected by people.⁴⁰

³⁶ Pavao VI., Apostolski nagovor o evangelizaciji u suvremenom svijetu *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8. prosinca 1975.), KS, Zagreb, 2000, 70.

³⁷ Cf. CL, 36.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Cf. Hrvatska biskupska konferencija, *Na svetost pozvani. Pastoralne smjernice na početku trećeg tisućljeća*, GK, Zagreb, 2002, 94.

⁴⁰ Cf. CL, 42.

In the light of their apostolate, the lay faithful are called to be present as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, that is, in the world of education-school and university-in places of scientific and technological research, the areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities. Such a presence is destined not only for the recognition and possible purification of the elements that critically burden existing culture, but also for the elevation of these cultures through the riches which have their source in the Gospel and the Christian faith.⁴¹ In a word, they are called to permeate the complex world of today's culture with the values of the Gospel and to be the protagonists and the "creators of a new, more humane culture".⁴²

3. Empirical research: social engagement of RE teachers in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska

At the end of 2016, the Catechetical office of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska carried out survey research on the social engagement of RE teachers in the territory of the Archdiocese in order to have deeper insight into their activities, both in the Church and in society. The research was supported at a regular meeting of the catechists in November 2016, and was conducted in December 5–19, 2016, through the use of web-based questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 262 e-mail addresses of all the RE teachers registered with the Catechetical Office of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska. 133 catechists responded to the questionnaire or 50.76%. The survey was conducted anonymously because the questionnaire design software does not collect data on the electronic addresses. The scope of the questionnaire is much wider than the following analysis and results. In our opinion, the analysis includes only more important aspects of the social engagement of RE teachers.

3.1. Research outcome

Concerning information about the gender and age of RE teachers who took part in the study, it is evident that RE teachers of all ages participated equally. However, a disproportionate share of the male participants (81% women, 19% men) was expected if we take into account a high percentage of female catechists (80% of the women) in their total number.(cf. Table 1).

Regarding to the qualifications of RE teachers, the number of the catechists is significantly higher (76%) than that of theologians (24%), though this ratio corresponds to their employment in primary and secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska.⁴³

⁴¹ Cf. CL, 44.

⁴² CL, 5.

⁴³ Data taken from the Archives of the Catechetical Office of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska.

Table 1. Data on the gender and age of RE teachers

	GENDER		AGE					MARITAL STATUS	
	M	F	under 30 years	30-40 years	40-50 years	50-60 years	over 60 years	married	married
N*	25	108	19	33	46	31	4	98	35
%	19	81	14	25	35	23	3	74	26

*N stands for the number of survey participants

Furtherly, since a great majority of the catechists (79%) are full-time employees, the results of this study are relevant. Concerning their work experience, RE teachers who have less work experience as well as those having many years of work experience are almost equally represented, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Qualifications and experience of RE teachers

	DEGREE PROGRAM		EMPLOYED IN			EMPLOYMENT STATUS		YEARS OF WORK EXPERIENCE				
	Theol. catech.	Philo. teol.	pri- mary	high	Prim./ High	Full- time	Part- time	under 5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 and over
N	101	32	98	24	11	105	28	23	25	22	22	41
%	76	24	74	18	8	79	21	17	19	16,5	16,5	31

It is worth mentioning that 28% of RE teachers have two degrees, mostly in the field of humanities, and 39% of them have completed additional training or course e.g. informatics, supervision or foreign language, and 5% of them have a doctoral degree (cf. Table 3). Interest in attending various courses and skill acquisition reflect the RE teachers' involvement in activities other than teaching religious education in schools. They also attend additional teacher training programs especially those aimed to RE teacher training for students with disabilities.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb provides the one-year Continuing Education Program offering 100 hours of lectures, seminars and exercises. Six RE teachers from the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska completed this program. Their acquired knowledge and skills are put into practice through teaching religious education in the Upbringing and Education Center for Persons with Disabilities.

⁴⁵ Since this is a multiple choice question, evidently some RE teachers have completed different trainings.

Table 3. Additional training of RE teachers

	ADDITIONAL TRAINING ⁴⁵	
	N	%
Training or course (informatics, supervision, foreign language, etc.)	53	39
Two degrees:	38	28
A doctoral degree:	7	5
Something else:	5	4
None of the above :	45	33

3.2. Extracurricular activities of RE teachers

Before we proceed to the analysis of the RE teachers' extra-curricular activities, it is important to point out that the Catholic religious education in school is definitely a social science subject.⁴⁶This is evident in the programs of Catholic religious education for primary and secondary schools which encompass social topics and issues such as education for peace, caring for creation, freedom, social justice, human labor and creativity, solidarity, protection of marriage and family, the rights of the child and so on. The contents of these programs highlight the RE teachers' social sensitivity and responsibility for transferring social values to students of all ages in line with the Christian principles.

On the basis of the research results, in addition to the regular education classes, 74.5% of RE teachers often or regularly take part in various extra-curricular activities in their schools (cf., Table 4). The goal of extra-curricular activities is primarily the deepening of the content of religious education, developing sense of solidarity with the needy, learning about and preserving the national cultural heritage and the protection and promotion of human rights, especially the rights of the child and the protection of the family.

Extra-curricular activities in which RE teachers regularly take part are public holidays and social events, such as the Days of Bread and Thanksgiving, All Saints, St. Nicholas, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter,

⁴⁶ This assumption is supported by the fact that many meetings on social issues were held at the level of the Archdiocese and national level: *Vjeronauk kao mjesto odgoja za društvenost* (KLJŠ, Split, 23-25 August 2004), *Vjeronauk u školi kao doprinos dijalogu vjere i kulture* (KLJŠ, Split, 28-30 August 2006), *Vjeronauk u školi u društveno-religijskom kontekstu* (KLJŠ, Split, 21-23 August 2008), *Vjeronauk i vjeroučitelj pred društvenim izazovima* (Split, 28 November 2009), *Vjeronauk i nacionalni identitet* (Split, 3 March 2012), *Gradanski odgoj i obrazovanje i Vjeronauk* (Split, 8 March 2014), *Odgoj za mir* (KLJŠ, Split, 24-25 August 2015) i *Uloga medija u odgoju i obrazovanju djece i mladih* (Split, 21 November 2015).

Mother's Day, the Anniversary of Fall of Vukovar, Homeland War Anniversaries, School Annual Day Celebration, City's /Municipality's Anniversary Day etc. They are also active in different groups such as charitable, volunteer, liturgical prayer, missionary, Bible study, drama, literary, art, film, ecological, ethnological, cultural heritage, etc., as well as activities related to the participation of students in the Religion Olympics and school competition. RE teachers actively participate in various school projects at local, regional, national or international levels such as Education in Solidarity Project, Stop the Violence Project, Eco School Project, Peer Support Learning Project, The Chakavian Word Evening Project, The Schools for Africa Project, Erasmus plus etc.

Social sensitivity among students and helping low-income students are often and regularly promoted by 84% of RE teachers, and 69.5% of them often and regularly assist the most vulnerable people (cf., Table 4). These activities mostly refer to the provision of food, clothing, money for the poor and vulnerable, purchase of handmade souvenirs and decorations aimed at donating money to the needy, especially at the time of the most important Christian feast days, on Christmas Eve and Easter Eve, and organizing charity concerts, performances and exhibitions. Also, 58% RE teachers along with the students visit elderly persons at care homes, children at the Centers for Children with Disabilities, drug rehab facilities and institutions for children and young adults without parental care (cf. Table 4).

RE teachers especially collaborate with various humanitarian and charitable associations such as Caritas, Social supermarket, The Well Association, Mary's Meals, Student Catholic Center (SKAC), Franciscan Youth (Frama), NGO Most, non-profit organization MI, Red Cross, White Cane Association and other local associations which primarily provide assistance to persons with disabilities and children who are suffering from various malignant diseases. 49% of RE teachers often and regularly participate in volunteering activities (cf., Table 4). A great majority of them volunteer in the parish community, church associations, civil society organizations and social welfare institutions in the local community.

However, that results referring to the ecumenical and interfaith sensitivity of RE teachers are rather satisfactory, but it is due to the prevalence of Roman Catholic population in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska and the fact that other religious communities are under-represented and are mainly concentrated in the city of Split. 70% of RE teachers encourage students to participate in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and 15.5% of them participate in such dialogue in the parish community and the Archdiocese, and 10.5% of RE teachers organize ecumenical and interfaith meetings for their students (cf. Table 4). RE teachers usually organize ecumenical and/or interfaith meetings with representatives of the Orthodox and Protestant churches and the Jewish and Islamic communities.

Table 4. Extra-curricular activities of RE teachers

	never		sometimes		often		regularly	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In addition to regular classes I participate in other school activities:	2	1,5	29	22	38	28,5	64	48
I encourage students to help those coming from low-income families:	0	0	21	16	30	22,5	82	61,5
I support student- teacher participation in activities aimed at assisting the most vulnerable people:	2	1,5	39	29	34	25,5	58	44
I participate in volunteer activities:	21	16	47	35	39	29	26	20
I encourage students to volunteer:	4	3	31	23	57	43	41	31
I participate in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue in the parish community and the Archdiocese:	65	49	50	37,5	8	6	10	7,5
I encourage students to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue:	2	1,5	38	28,5	35	26	58	44
I organize ecumenical and /or interfaith meetings:	82	61,5	37	28		4,5	8	6

3.3. The engagement of RE teachers in the parish community

Apart from teaching religious education, RE teachers actively participate in their parish communities. According to survey responses, the parish catechesis is often and regularly performed by 48% of RE teachers, whereas 80% of them are involved in various forms of both parish and the Church lives, e.g. readers, members of the parish choir, animators, members of pastoral and economic councils, Parish Caritas and the like. Moreover, 40% of RE teachers are active in communities of adult believers and various ecclesial associations and movements of their parishes (cf., Table 5). They are involved in liturgical prayer group, charismatic prayer group, family group, charitable community, the Bible study group and community of the young. In regard to the ecclesial communities or movements, they are mostly involved in the Association of Salesian Cooperators, the Secular Franciscan Order, Friends of the Infant Jesus, the Legion of Mary, the Neocatechumenal Way, the Community *Prayer and Word* and the various fraternities within parish communities.

Although the results related to the engagement of RE teachers in the parish community are satisfactory and promising, bearing in mind the guidelines of the Church documents referring to their spiritual and faith-filled professional identity, their active involvement in the parish commu-

Table 5. The engagement of RE teachers in the parish community

	never		some- times		often		regu- larly	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In addition to teaching RE, I am active in the parish catechesis:	27	20	42	32	19	14	45	34
I participate in a community of adult believers in my parish:	50	37,5	30	22,5	14	11	39	29

nity should be a constant concern of the Church. Of course, this concern should not be interpreted as a hierarchical control, but as the outcome and expression of an authentic vocation and mission of RE teachers who should be deeply immersed in the life of the Church community.

3.4. Social engagement of RE teachers

The research results indicate to a significant engagement of RE teachers in a broader social context. 28.5% of RE teachers often or regularly participate in the social life of their town or the town quarter. Most of them are engaged in the area of culture (39%), politics (16%), media (10%) and other (13%) as shown in Table 6. In the area of culture, they participate or organize music and poetry nights, debates and lectures, visits to galleries and museums, and other cultural and sports events organized to celebrate the patron of the city or parish. In the area of politics, they regularly participate in elections and are actively engaged in the political parties and democracy-promoting initiatives⁴⁷ in civil society. In the area of media, RE teachers are engaged as cooperators or editors in local newspapers, television and radio shows and websites. As distinguished and deserving members of the school staff, they are also appointed school principals.⁴⁸

In order to be truly recognized in the community, RE teachers should be “men and women of their time, fully identified with their people, open to the real problems and sensitive to the culture, society and politics. RE teachers do not perform their task well if they are very generous, pious and devoted to the Church, but in some way tend to lose sight of the social and cultural life. Only the men and women deeply immersed in the reality of the world can be qualified for faith formation in line with the current

⁴⁷ Currently, RE teachers hold the following positions: Member of Parliament, mayor, deputy mayor, county, city and municipal councilors.

⁴⁸ Recently, five RE teachers have been elected principals.

⁴⁹ Since this is a multiple choice question, consequently some RE teachers participated in a few areas of social life, though there were 56 (42%) of them who were not involved in any area of the social life.

Table 6. Social engagement of RE teachers

	never		some-times		often		regularly	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I participate in the social life of my town or the town quarter:	42	31,5	53	40	20	15	18	13,5
	culture		politics		media		other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I am actively involved in areas of the social life of my town or the town quarter: ⁴⁹	53	39	21	16	13	10	17	13

requirements of the Christian life”.⁵⁰ This indicates to the importance of “local” RE teachers whose contribution to the society and culture should be encouraged and promoted.

Conclusion

What is expected from all the lay faithful is even more required and expected from RE teachers because of their theological and catechetical competences and active involvement in the Church’s mission through Catholic religious education. RE teachers simply cannot close in their narrow professional field, but actively engage in the Church’s pastoral and in all areas of social and cultural life. In this way, they can become important promoters of the new conciliar image of the Church and its presence in the world. In this context, RE teachers should be encouraged for greater social engagement in today’s world. Therefore, this research aims not only to present the facts referring to the social engagement of RE teachers in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska, but also to encourage them for more fervent engagement in school, the parish and the wider community. Depending on their creativity and personal preferences, RE teachers can freely choose among various possibilities.

⁵⁰ E. Alberich, *Kateheza danas*, KSC, Zagreb, 2012, p. 323.