

Help for the survivors of Nazi concentration camps and ghettos in the name of reconciliation

Mission

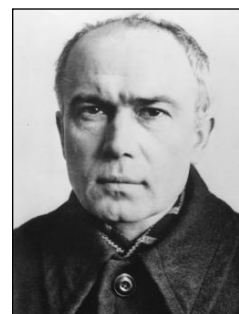
Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk is a relief organization for the survivors of Nazi concentration camps and ghettos. It supports the former prisoners in Poland and in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe irrespective of their religion, denomination or worldview. In total about 20,000 survivors are still living there. Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk organizes projects of assistance locally, stays of recreation and interaction in Germany, lectures and interviews with survivors in schools, parishes and educational centres. The organization and its work are financed primarily by private donations.

History and patron

In 1964 a group of Christians of the German Section of pax christi visited the former concentration camp Auschwitz. There they met former Auschwitz prisoners who lived on the edge of poverty. At the time, reparation and financial compensation on the part of German Federal Government were not yet in sight. As part of the campaign "solidarity donation", pax christi Germany decided to provide first aid in the form of financial assistance as an expression of sympathy and solidarity with the former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps.

In 1973, despite the very difficult political relations between Germany and Poland, Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk was founded. Its foundation was driven by Alfons Erb, the Vice-President of pax christi, and unanimously decided by the Central Committee of German Catholics and 13 Catholic organizations.

Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk was named after Maximilian Kolbe (1894 to 1941). The Polish Franciscan monk Kolbe died in the concentration camp of Auschwitz in 1941: As a punishment for the flight of one prisoner, ten inmates were picked out at random. Maximilian Kolbe offered his own life for that of Franciszek Gajowniczek, a Polish family man. In his place Maximilian Kolbe went into the hunger cell, where after two weeks he was killed on August 14, 1941 with a lethal injection of phenol. In 1982 Kolbe was canonized. His feast day is August 14.



Humanitarian aid in Poland

10.000 former prisoners are currently living in Poland. Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk provides them with tailored humanitarian aid:

Individual financial aid: Annual personal grants between 150 and 600 euro upon application

At-home care: Funding of at-home care provided by nurses and other qualified staff.

In the city of Lodz Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk maintains a social medical center. In addition to offering appointments with various doctors, the center also organizes meals-on-wheels services for survivors in Lodz as well as distributes medical equipment to survivors throughout Poland.

In Krakow Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk funds an ambulance center for survivors.

Recreational and recovery measures: Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk annually offers around 300 places for recreational stay as well as 150 places for survivors living alone to spend the Christmas and New Year's holidays together.

Home visits: Every year German volunteers visit hundreds of seriously ill and bedridden survivors at their homes in Poland.

Self-help network in Poland

In almost all of the 49 former Polish provinces the so-called "persons of trust", mostly survivors of concentration camps, coordinate the aid programs of Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk. They are the first contact for their comrades and important multipliers.

Humanitarian aid in other countries

Since 1992 Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk also supports survivors in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In total 26 transports of humanitarian aid were carried out by German volunteers to Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Each time between 1200 and 1500 survivors received financial and material aid.

In 2002, the so-called "projects of assistance and encounter" replaced the transportation of humanitarian aid to the Eastern European countries: Representatives of Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk come together with the survivors at central meetings and visit ill and bedridden survivors at their homes. Each survivor personally receives financial aid. Since 2002 such projects have been carried out in Moldova, Russia and its enclave Kaliningrad, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Those programs are carried out in other regions annually.

Recreational stays near places of living of the survivors: 2007 the first two recreational stays took place in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This program has been expanding ever since.

Reconciliation via interaction

Since 1978 Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk annually invites former prisoners of the concentration camps and Holocaust survivors to visit Germany. More than 16,000 visits have been made ever since. During their 2 week stay, guests from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries are cared for by German volunteers. For survivors these visits are often the first contact with the "country of the perpetrators" since the end of World War 2. The re-encounter with Germans, the German language, and often with the sites of suffering, in many cases lead to spiritual liberation. These projects also include interaction with German pupils in schools where former prisoners tell young people about their painful experiences in the concentration camps.

Educational programs

Survivors as contemporary witnesses of the past meet with pupils: People who have suffered in the concentration camps pass on their experience to young people. Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk annually invites survivors to Germany in order to bring them together with young people in schools. These encounters help to build bridges between the witnesses of the past and the young people whose task it will be to shape the future.

International Meetings: Since 2010 Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk organizes international meetings between survivors and young journalists from Germany, Poland and other European countries in the former concentration camp Auschwitz and other camps in Germany. Since 2013, an annual further education seminar for teachers takes place in Auschwitz.

Voluntary work in Germany

In Germany, around 80 volunteers are involved in our work. Selfless and with great commitment of time and energy, they carry out their tasks and make the various initiatives of Maximilian-Kolbe-Work possible.

Dates and facts

Foundation: 1973

Founder and First CEO: Alfons Erb (1907 to 1983)

President: Peter Weiß, Member of German Bundestag (since 2010)

Vice-Presidents: dr. Oliver Müller, Johannes Schnettler

CEO: Christoph Kulesa

Information for donors

Account for donations: IBAN DE18 4006 0265 0003 0349 00

Bank: Darlehnskasse Münster

BIC/Swift: GENODEM1DKM

Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk has been awarded the **DZI Seal-of-Approval**

(„Since 1992, the German Central Institute for Social Issues (DZI) awards the DZI Seal-of-Approval to deserving charities which voluntarily submit themselves to an extensive examination by DZI on an annual basis. Among other examination criteria, crucial emphasis is placed on truthful and respectable methods in fund raising as well as verifiable, prudent and statutory deployment of funds.”)

Contact information

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