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Patriarch Ilia baptizes 564 children in 59th mass ceremony



His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, the beloved spiritual father of all Georgia, celebrated his 59th mass infant Baptism at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi yesterday on the feast of St. Cosmas and Damian of Rome.



The Georgian primate became the Godfather to another 564 children this time, reports 1tv.ge.



The Baptisms were celebrated in the second half of the day. Upon completion, His Holiness personally blessed all of his new Godchildren and every newly-baptized child was also given a cross and a certificate of Baptism.



“God is with us. I congratulate you on this happy day. By the grace of God, we baptized more than 500 children today. I pray to God to ever protect them,” said Pat. Ilia.



With the first mass Baptism on January 19, 2008, Patriarch Ilia commenced his initiative to help improve the dire demographic situation in Georgia caused by post-Soviet abortion rates. Such mass celebrations are held four times a year in which the primate personally baptizes and becomes the Godfather for the third and later children of married Orthodox couples.

To date, he has become the Godfather to 39,242 children.



According to the latest statistics, the country has a population of 3,718,200. According to the forecast of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), this number may drop to 2,985,000 people by 2050.

Pat. Ilia has been the primate of the Georgian Church for 41 years. At the time of his enthronement, there were 15 dioceses and only 30 active churches left thanks to communist persecutions. Today there are 47 dioceses and about 2,000 active parishes, as well as about 3,000 clergy.

– Photo: patriarchate.ge | Source: [OrthoChristian](https://www.OrthoChristian.com)