

## **Patriarch Daniel's 69th birthday and the diligence of 'the hands of God's merciful love'**



**'Let us become the hands of God's merciful love,' is the advice that characterizes the 69 years of life, but especially the almost 13 years of patriarchal ministry of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel.**

Under the stewardship of His Beatitude, the Romanian Orthodox Church has become the greatest philanthropist as regards the contribution to social work, mobilizing institutions and people in the service of those in difficulty. Remarkable was the involvement of the Church in the fight against the current epidemic and its effects in society.

On the occasion of His Beatitude's birthday on July 22 and in the context of the Commemorative Year of the Romanian Orthodox Philanthropists, we bring to your attention a synthesis of the social work of the Church under the coordination of Patriarch Daniel.

In parallel with the liturgical life, with the building of places of worship, with the missionary and cultural activities, the philanthropy of the Church was concentrated towards several disadvantaged areas. Here are the main places where "the hands

of God's merciful love" worked diligently under the direction of the Patriarch:

### **The village**

The Solemn Year of the Romanian Village (2019) was a landmark in this regard and an alarm signal to the whole society. The message sent by the Romanian Patriarch was that "We must mobilize for action in favour of the Romanian village, and not look nostalgically at it." His Beatitude also formulated a set of proposals for improving the situation in rural Romania.

The Patriarch of Romania paid attention to this disadvantaged segment from the period when he was Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina through the Program "No village without a church". The care of His Beatitude for the rural communities was not limited to the spiritual and liturgical aspect. It continued to manifest itself during the patriarchal ministry with various programs to support the families of priests in poor parishes and then with the large-scale project "Health for Villages", following the Protocol signed with the Ministry of Health in September 2015.

### **The elderly**

The sick, lonely and helpless seniors are another segment in the focus of the philanthropic work in the Church under the leadership of the current Patriarch.

At the initiative of Patriarch Daniel, the "Saint Nectarios" Palliative Care Center and the "Saint Sylvester" Residential Center for the Elderly were founded in Bucharest.

At the level of the Romanian Patriarchate, in 2019 alone, over 45,000 elderly people, lonely seniors, homebound, abandoned by their families or those who had serious health problems received assistance in church social protection centres, social transit centres and night shelters.

### **Children, families**

The "Saint Sophia" children's day centre was founded in the Archdiocese of Bucharest at the initiative of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, in 2012.

The Romanian Patriarchate currently has 107 day centres for children, 52 social assistance offices and community centres, 38 family-type centres, 51 social and afterschool kindergartens, 13 sheltered housing facilities, 15 emergency centres (for homeless people, for victims of domestic violence and for victims of human trafficking), 18 camp campuses, 51 educational centres. Through these centres,

more than 46,000 children received support in 2019.

At the same time, more than 19,000 adults in difficulty, unemployed, victims of human trafficking, victims of domestic violence, released detainees, victims of natural disasters were supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church last year.

The education of children was also supported by the Church. The national project “Christ shared with children” and the socio-educational project “Choose the school!” were initiated under the leadership of Patriarch Daniel, in order to prevent and combat school dropout. Also worth mentioning is the “Stay in School” Program, run by volunteers from the National Cathedral’s Chapel.

During the pandemic, the Church donated 4,617 tablets and other electronic devices to students and teachers.

## **Healthcare**

The medical campaign “Health for villages”, mentioned above, has grown and diversified into: “Prevention and Education for Health”, “Prevention and detection of cervical cancer” plus various other free consultation and medical tests for thousands of people.

Under the leadership of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, the Romanian Patriarchate became the institution with the largest contribution to increasing the number of blood donors. Since 2013, with the involvement of over 35,000 volunteers, over 19,000 litres of blood have been collected as part of the “Donate blood, save a life!” Campaign. More recently, the telemedicine project “Health at a click away” is being carried out in the Romanian Patriarchate.

It is noteworthy the numerous donations of the Church to hospitals. These have grown exponentially in the medical crisis caused by Covid-19.

Caring for the mental and physical health of people has been and is a constant concern of our Church. In this sense, with the blessing of Patriarch Daniel, the “Table of Joy” Program has been running at a national level since 2016. In partnership with the Selgros Cash & Carry and Carrefour Romania stores, food and hygiene goods are donated weekly to the social centres.

From 2007 until now, the amount spent by the Romanian Orthodox Church for social purposes has exceeded 210 million euros. During the pandemic alone, the aid provided by the Church amounted to over 4 million euros.

## **Did the Church aim to become the greatest philanthropist?**

Some would think that these figures and the diligence behind them are mere goals that the Church aspires to achieve. In fact, it is a responsibility and a dominant one in the tradition of the Church that was absent during the communist period, and now it is returning to normal. The explanation comes from the Patriarch himself:

*It became not because it set out to do so – I found out later – but because the church felt the responsibility to unite the Liturgy with philanthropy. In our time, if a beautiful sermon is not accompanied by a philanthropic or cultural or artistic-ecclesiastical action, it is not credible or complete. And this correlation between spirituality and action, between Liturgy and philanthropy, is a dominant one in the whole tradition of our Church. But during communism, the Church was often reduced to a purely liturgical institution, without any social-philanthropic impact.*

*“That is why, after the changes of 1989, we returned to our old tradition, namely the presence of charity priests in military units, hospitals, penitentiaries and other state units; because it requires a strengthening of the soul and an awareness of the relationship between freedom and responsibility. And so, this social-philanthropic development became a completion, somewhat, of the Divine Liturgy in the Church.”*

*“It can be seen that where the monasteries offer an agape meal after the Divine Liturgy, more believers come; where communion in prayer is combined with communion at an agape meal, at a table, at which people can relate, talk to each other face to face; the idea of the Church continues, as communion and community.”*

*(Excerpts from the interview offered by Patriarch Daniel for TVR in 2018).*

On Wednesday, July 22, 2020, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church celebrated his 69th birthday. This moment was marked by prayers of thanksgiving at the Patriarchal Cathedral.

The official feast day of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel is on September 30, the date of the enthronement of His Beatitude in the dignity of Patriarch of Romania.

Source