

### Baptists in Romania

The population of Romania is 21,5 million of which 90% are Romanians and the remaining 10% are ethnic minorities including Hungarians and Gypsies. The dominant religion is Orthodoxy – 90% of population adheres to it and the second largest denomination is Protestantism with 5,5% of followers.



One must not forget that the Romanian Baptists used to be harshly persecuted by the past Communist regime. It is only since the beginning of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Baptists have experienced unprecedented freedom.

According to recent estimates the Evangelical believers in Romania comprise ca. 5 % of the population. At least 7 million Romanians have no access to any Evangelical church and some ethnic groups are still not reached like: Gypsies and Turks.

The Baptist denomination is a mass movement in Romania. There are several mega-churches that belong to the Baptist

Union, the largest one with over 3,000 members is located in Oradea. There are several large congregations comprising over 1,000 members. Besides excellent preaching they also feature wonderful choirs, music ensembles and large buildings.

New projects have emerged, like: “Ruth” – educating the Gypsy children and “Esther” – adopting orphaned children from Asia. The President of the Baptist Union of Romania, Dr. Otniel Bunaciu describes Romanian Baptists as *“Bible-believing people who have the goal of bringing the Gospel to a needy world”*. The union strives to mobilize every member in the mission work.

There are opportunities even in western countries as new churches are being planted by the Romanians who have emigrated. An international work called “Mission Torch Europe” to start new churches by the Romanians who emigrated to Great Britain, Iberia, Scandinavia, etc. About 200 missionaries have been sent from Romania to do mission work abroad.

The Baptist Union of Romania is the third largest Baptist body in Europe. There are 1,722 churches and about 100,000 members. The Convention of the Hungarian Baptist Churches in Romania is comprised of 247 churches and nearly 9,000 members.

## **Church Planting in Romania**

Hundreds of new church plants have been started since the independence in 1990 as the existing churches run ambitious mission programs aimed at planting new congregations. Dr. Daniel Maris, president of the Bucharest Baptist Association, explains that the indigenous church planters receive regular guidance and encouragement from the experienced pastors. He says: *“we meet a few times a year with the church planters in their places of ministry to understand better the context of their work and provide them the support they may need. In addition courses of mission and church planting are offered thanks to good cooperation with the Baptist Theological Seminary.”*

Pastor Maris states that the prevailing model of church planting is the “Traditional Church Extension Model” (this method is also called “cloning”). It is when a church is planted by an existing church located nearby and the new plant is a satellite to the mother church. The mother church supervises the leaders of the satellite congregation. At some point the new church plant becomes autonomous (independent) from the mother church however they still maintain relationship.

## **Indigenous Church Planter George in Pantelimon**

I wish to introduce George, one of the indigenous church planters successfully working in Romania.

George is 43, married and has 4 children. He was raised in a Baptist family and trained at the Baptist Seminary of Bucharest. Later he was called to Pantelimon inhabited by 17,000 people and there was no Evangelical church at that time. George has a vision for a community of believers who live out their Christian lives and are able to influence others. They want to start many cell groups in this town. The vision includes also a reproducing church planting. The mother church is from Bucharest.

Here are just a few basic facts from George’s diary about this exciting ministry.

### **Gospel in a Garage**

*The place where we had started our gatherings in 2009 was in the beginning ... a garage (5.5m long and 3m wide) that I arranged with chairs and benches. We organized our first meetings for worship and preaching of the Word. The original group counted only around 10 members who agreed to participate in the program.*

*We started the evangelization and could see very good results, praise the Lord! The group grew and the number of children participating in Sunday school also increased. In two months time the space became too small and this prompted us to buy a second adjacent garage which was just like the existing one. But very soon even two garages were not enough because the work was growing really fast and we decided to do another extension. This time we bought two more garages that were next to our meeting place. We arranged doors, windows and put a roof so that the four separate garages looked like a unified building now :)))*



## **Expansion**

Now, in 2010, we had several rooms for our disposal. We started classes of instruments (guitar, mandolin and piano), English language and computer. The participants were young people and started attending youth meetings on Saturday.



With the help of many volunteers we organized an outreach campaign which drew about 400 people from Pantelimon. We pitched a tent in the churchyard so that all invited people could fit in where I preached the Word and we enjoyed more grace from God.

Our church has grown to 45 regular members and numerous friends. We were encouraged to expand and started building a provisional chapel of wood.

## **Regular Activities**

There were some people who became discontent about our involvement in various outreach actions, particularly when I organized a group of young people to clean our district of town. They didn't understand that the Church could do such a thing and left our fellowship with my blessing.



Baptist Congregation in Pantelimon

Our regular weekly activities: Wednesday – visits to evangelism and fellowship with families in groups of discipleship. Friday – Bible study and training for leaders. Saturday – rehearsal of choir and orchestra, in the evening youth meeting. Sunday morning – service and in the evening – outreach. Last Friday of a month – special program that lasts till midnight. This is really great!!!

## **Further Growth**

The new planted church has now regular attendance about 100. We have developed a number of activities, like: spreading God's grace and mission work, there is a choir and orchestra, distribution of food to families who have many children.

Three cars, including my old van Ford Transit 1996 (we call it a Blue donkey) transported more than 25 people at Christmas time to different non Christian families



*where we sang Christmas carols and talked with them about the Gospel. We visited more than 30 homes in Pantelimon, Popesti - Leordeni and Bucharest.*

### ***Wider influence***

*God gave us opportunity to begin a relationship with some business people who own a furniture factory. They heard about the children celebration which we had in our church and they wanted to provide gifts for all our children. The sponsors invited also their relatives and children to our church. It was a special service when our church prayed for the children and gave gifts which were packed in nice boxes. This particular service echoed very well in Pantelimon. Praise God!*



*In August 2010 we celebrated the baptism of new members in God's family. Six persons decided to follow Jesus and join our fellowship. They wore white robes and publicly confessed their faith in Jesus Christ After the baptism we gave them a baptism certificate. We also started a follow up group for new members.*

*I decided to go with brother Vali to the Romanian Parliament to give a New Testament to each senator. About 500 New Testaments were given, and the same number of letters to encourage them to seek the Face of God. We spoke with many of them and continue praying for them. This was possible because of my regular participation in the prayer group every Tuesday morning in the Romanian Parliament.*

### **Prayer Request**

As you read these testimonies, please pray for the newly planted congregations in Romania. I'm sure there will be more mission stories from this country...

In Christ,

***Daniel Trusiewicz***  
***EBF Mission Coordinator***

**To help planting reproducing churches!**

**To help growing healthy churches!**

**For the glory of God!**