

**SHORT CHRONICLE OF A MONASTERY.
MISSIONARY EXPECTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT**

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Abstract: Through all its representatives the church has the mission to grow the ideal of Christian morality, by making known to the humans the sacred and eternal teachings of God. Saint George – Buciumeni Monastery is the place where exists a philanthropic social institution for taking care of the elderly based on the kindly nuns. Here the faithful come to pray or to meditate. Putting into practice the teachings surging in the parable of “The Ten Virgins”, the nuns pray and strive that through their good works they be closed to people’s souls.

Keywords : monastery, church, monasticism, prayer, philanthropy.

Entering the Suceava County you are invited into a special placed called “Bucovina, the Monastery Land”. Bucovina is an area with many old buildings located in national patrimony, monasteries and charitable establishments for prayer, culture and meditation. In the south – east of Suceava County on the European Road E85, at 25 km of Suceava City, it is the Fălticeni City.

There, in the west of the Fălticeni City you can see the Saint George – Buciumeni Monastery. This Fălticeni City was formed on the site of ancient rural settlements dated at 1400. The village “Fulticeanii” that gave the name to the city today it is certified in one documentary mention in the year 1435. At March 15th 1490 a document written in the Suceava Chancery tells us about another “Village of Fulticeanii”¹, placed on the edge of the Somuz River. Saint George – Buciumeni Monastery is situated on the outskirts of Fălticeni City, in the area named “Wonderful Grove”.

It is a magical place, full of green, history, legend and mistery that surprises you and invites you at the same time to meditate and contemplate.

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¹ See www.e-tur.ro/Romanian/Falticeni/prezentation, accessed at: 4/29/2009.

The Romanian writer Mihail Sadoveanu and the painters Aurel Băieșu and Rudolf Schweitzer-Cumpănă present the beauty of that area in their works that made from it a national treasure.

This Monastery was founded in 1993 as a hermitage and become a monastery in 1997.

The Monastery has two churches: a big one built of brick, painted clear, with saints that spread faith to believers, and another one, smaller, built of wood and protected as historical monument.

Next to the church a little meet mother Epiftemia that help us understand the history of the monastery with the same ease with which they read from the book of Psalms that gateway with drag beside her soul.

The Saint George-Buciumeni Monastery is descendant of the Saint George Church that belongs to the Oprișeni Parish from the Fălticeni City, Suceava County, one of the oldest settlement in the area.

The name of “buciumeni” comes from ancient times when villagers had to announce through an instrument called “bucium” the movement of the army, departures and arrivals of messengers into the Baia Fortress.

The oldest (ancient) document that tell us about Buciumeni Village is dated from February 16th 1424, when Alexandru Voivode made donation the Buciumeni Village to Iuga Priest. In this document it is written that²: Alexandru Voivode “Bojio milostio Gospodar zemli Moldavscoi”. It is announced through this document that the priest named Iuga, who served with faith, was blessed and gifted with a Buciumeni Village, next to Baia. And the borders of this village were between the hill and the old oak to the stream. Iuga Priest was an important person of his time together with his brother Nanu.

Iuga Priest is chronicled many times through documents donations that were made by act of the Voivode. On July 28 Alexandru Voivode confirm Nanu Boyar Buciumeni and Stanigeni villages. The rule is written in Church Slavonic language and is kept today at the Museum in Suceava, being taken from the Museum in Falticeni.

The document from 1424 to Priest Iuga stayed for a long time in possession of Catinca V. Diaconu, which inherited it from generation to generation. The Ciurea Teacher craved for this document for his museum. He became godfather for the Catinca’s son and took this document³. We have little historical data about Buciumeni Village and its wooden Church. Fiscal statistics⁴ from 1831 shows that: in Buciumeni Village, on Buciumeni estate ruled by the villagers, worked as priest: Teodor the Priest, Gheorghe the Priest, Constantin the Priest, Constantin the

² George Ioan Lahovari (coordinating), *The Great Geographical Dictionary of Romania*, Bucharest, 1898, pp. 668-669.

³ Eugen Dimitriu, *City museum-house and memorial places Fălticeni*, Historic Bukovina Publishing, 2002, p. 56.

⁴ Neicov – Inventory valuables historical and documentary St. Gheorghe Church Buciumeni prepared in 1967.

deacon, Vasile the psalm reader, Niță the psalm reader, Vasile basil of Ștefan Chitic, Niță, Alexandru and others.

The villagers of these places guarded the borders, and the monks waked night and day through prayers and church services. In "Falticeni" Paper the Scholar Arthur Gorovei recorded that in 1850 the Buciumeni Village had a church, two priests, a deacon, six helpless people, two psalm readers, a privileged, twenty-five former noblemen, six widows.

In church Oprișeni Syndically (1937) at page 45, Vasile Costăchescu noted that the church of Buciumeni, named by Saint George, was built of local wood, like the old church Saint Ilie, and it had founded in 1765. This fact was noted even on the Saviour Icon inside the church. We found written in "The Great Geographical Dictionary" the Buciumeni villagers was only six souls in 1803. There was 45 houses, with 44 heads of the families or 205 souls (102 mens and 103 womens), a church and a school⁵.

The writer Eugen Dimitriu noted in his work "The Muses City – Memorial houses and Sites in Fălticeni" that here you can admire the Wonderful Grove and the Hermitage of nuns.

The Wooden Church with its cemetery, the altar with the Holy Table built on a huge block have three mural paintings made by local artist and future diplomat and politician, Romanian ambassador in Africa, Aurel Diaconescu.

The Buciumeni Church functioned as a parish church from its building until 1862 – the year when was opened a new and big church named Saints Michael and Gavril in Oprișeni.

Due to its age, the Church in Buciumeni, was renovated several times. Above the threshold of the door of the Church shall be recorded that it was repaired in 1892. On the inscription at the entrance of the Church, it looked like in the year 1930 there have been radical repair after it was returned to the cult.

The Buciumeni Church is mentioned in prince of documents Alexandru cel Bun from 16 February 1424 on the village Buciumeni. Many of these data have led to the inclusion of St. Gheorghe Church in classification of historical monuments at position 34-B-085.

Among the priests who had an important contribution to this church were: priest Ilie Anisescu (until 1973), priest Beraru Mihai (1973-1992), priest Dăscălașu Camil (1992-1993).

The carver Ioan Irimescu, teacher and member of the Romanian Academy remembered about the Buciumeni Church in discussions with his friends : the mayor Arteni Costică, P.C., Priest Brădațanu Gheorghe, the gendarme unit commander Mr. Gheorghe Bujor, the museum director Mr. Gheorghe Dăscălescu. Since 1970 a group of nuns had come to Buciumeni Church to make their prayers on monastery laws. The people of Falticeni knew them and searched their advices

⁵ George Ioan Lahovari, *op. cit.*, p. 668.

in order to respect the work they did. They were forced by political laws to leave their monastery and to live among common people.

But they still acted as nuns with strict rules of a monastery. The nuns were forced to work at Filatura Factory, but in the same time they acted by monastery laws, praying for them and for all the people. They were protected by the priest Ilie Anisescu, together with the people from Fălticeni. The great Ioan Irimescu said: if there the nuns work by monastery laws for such a long time that means there is already formed a monastery made of their love and dedication; this work must be legalized. All parishioners wished to found the monastery and signed a collective adhesion and a demand to I.P.S. Pimen to help them transform the status of their church into monastery. The first group of nuns were formed by the Mother Superior Petronia Andrieș, the nun Tecla Afloarei, the nun Epistimia Bejan, the nun Eupraxia Hoidrag, the nun Antonia Hoidrag. These nuns through the zeal and their fearless attitude have put into practice saying “man sanctifies the place” and ignoring the Decree 410 (who took by the nuns and monks in monasteries) they illegally prayed daily here, leading a religious life.

At December 2nd 1993 the I.P.S. Pimen and the Diocesan Council of Suceava and Rădăuți Archepiscopate had approved the establishment of Saint George – Buciumeni Church as Hermitage of Nuns, beginning with January 1st 1994. At December 13th 1997 The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to change the Hermitage of Nuns status and become the Saint George-Buciumeni Monastery, with the Mother Superior Semfora Lupu. From October 1st 2000 the Monastery was led by Mother Superior Maria Mălăescu.

The first community of nuns was formed by the nuns improperly removed from the monastery through the fatal decree 410. The Mother Superior says that after the decree a part of the expelled monastic personal lived with hope that they will come back in monastery.

There were some of them who chose the normal life, they married and have children. The ones who returned to the monastery had consulted with their family members. They returned because their love for God and for monahal life which represented their tranquility and peace of mind. At present the Monastery Buciumeni community has 20 nuns that work, learn, pray and try to do their best following tradition, consuming their meant with honesty and loyalty and living by the parable of “The Ten Virgins”.

Contemporary image of monastic activities of Buciumeni is the same with the ancient monasteries: the sacraments and church services, the holy bell, the holy cross, the traditions. In the monastery the division of responsibilities is after everyone skills and knowledge, after their gift from God. The nuns and the monastery priest Petru Cucu take care that everything works well: protection of property, civic and spiritual counseling, cultural activities and environmental protection, agricultural work at the monastery farm, help for the elderly and for the homeless.

The nuns from Buciumeni were taught by the eldest ones to respect the monastery life of virginity, poverty and listening in order to understand the Saviour words. In the monastery works a small social centre for the elderly like ancient hospitals.

Here is a safe home for the 15 old ladies, who live in clean and modern small rooms next to the monastery. These old ladies prove that they feel like home here and they try to make useful. They have initiative when there is something to do like: gardening, a good word for those suffering. The hardest moment represents the loss of one of them. Here at monastery are fed the homeless and the poor people. Their number grows but the nuns are with them. What we can do? If God is Our Father, that means the monastery represents a "Home to parents".

Mother Superior says that monastery is an oasis of comfort, a source of hope, a place of prayer where all asking for help, support, compassion, a place to meditate, to confess, to get over difficulties or to start over. Here we can find a permanent table for the hungry people, a wellspring for the thirsty, a roof over the head for the wanderers or pilgrimage.

Mother Superior says that monastery it is a school for the one who wants knowledge, it is sister and brother for the one who wants to live in peace, it is mother and father for orphans. Here in Fălticeni when the orphanage was closed, some children came to the monastery to search for help, protection, a guidance in life. They had learned about God at school. Thinking of Him guided their steps to the monastery. Although the small rooms were not finished and they lived through scaffolding and future plans, these children have not been removed.

Today this orphans are well, one of them are married, one of them still visit the monastery and others don't come at all. Mother Superior says that they are good people who knew how to give a helping hand to others. She adds that they were taught to quickly make their families, to work and give to others the fruits of their labor.

None of those children have taken the wrong road. And this is a great achievement. Mother Superior Maria says: "There were cases at the monastery when we fought with human helplessness taken to the extreme, in giving up the fight for life. When you feel death near you and fight with it, God help you and sends you the saving solution for the powerless. You can't tell many things without anyone guessing who it is, but I don't think we should hide that even when children give up life". Then I met with these unhappy people on the road: a woman hugged me but I didn't recognize because she was happy now with a smile. Another told me: "Hello, Mother!" and I knew that it wasn't just a greeting. A young man passed by Mother Maria without seeing her because he was the groom and perhaps his eyes were only for his bride, the girl who once wanted to die for.

Generally, the monks activity in monastery was a closed subject for us. Nobody should be rejected, the one who ask for help it is considered as a brother and even you have no time or you must rest, it is important to pay attention to them, so the one who entered God's House not to go away with sadness and no help.

“Enjoy yourself” is the most repeating words when they read an acatist. The nuns from the Saint George – Buciumeni Monastery dedicate time for the good of the others. They must stay permanently with their hand opened in order to help people and offer gifts received from God. If you make someone happy, you have part of happiness too, if you make someone to cry, you have part of tears too, if you are full give food to your brother too, if you have a roof above your head, you give a home to other, all of these being principles of monastery life.

In the past, the rulers of the country, the noblemen and their families built churches and monasteries providing them with all necessary. The monks and nuns must watch over construction works inside monasteries.

They built a new church named “Annunciation and Saint Alexander” with the blessing of I.P.S. Pimen, Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți, a place when once stood a cottage, in the Wonderful Grove. At present they are serving in the new church permanently. Next to the new church it’s the old church. White and clean, the church is dedicated to Virgin Mary by all its builders. They rarely serve in the church monument for the protection and conservation of the sanctuary. Nevertheless the Saint George Church is always open for all visitors, that want to pray or to meditate here. Its age is a silent history which gives you a strange feeling of eternity, stability and identity. It is a simple place that sends you to meditation, and it urges you to know yourself to stay in touch with the past and to identify yourself with the present, to know yourself, where you come from and what is your destination. Therefore many peoples come here to confess and pray together with the nuns. Those of the diaspora which are spiritually connected with these places are in touch with the nuns through the phone. They are missing their country and the remoteness makes them to establish a special connection with the nuns.

In these difficult times each proves the importance of unity of the same nation and faith. The unity is the glue that lead to human adaption to different condition of culture and civilization. This unity is done by church as a traditional rule for our people. According to the canons of the monastery people have been taught to understand the divine word “it is not good for human to be alone”, so it must be with family, friends, church because “it is good for brothers to be together”. From this unity results the good or bad character, the behaviour or proximity for others. The prayer is very important in people’s lives. The prayer is soul satisfaction for the monks and nuns.

The nuns are praying in their knees for hours and the priests are reading the acatists. Together with all the faithful they are serving God with glory and joy. By participating the church services you feel relaxed and full of true joy from the bottom of your soul. The sadness disappears and you receive power from yourself or maybe from other, in order you to move on, to offer when you are asked to provide and to find the answer in critical times. The prayer is made in church as a common prayer, together all for one. But this is not all. The nuns must pray endless with this prayer: “Lord Jesus, son of God, has mercy on me!” and many other that they know in their souls.

Mother Superior recalls with pleasure the other nuns which served here, each story such as: Mother Elefteria Pavel from Agapia Monastery, who used to have a family with a husband and children but never give up the monastic life. Mother Alexandra Ilie who loves the prayer made by midnight, so the others nuns think that she feels the presence of God among them. Mother Adriana Sandu who was seen as a blessing for her presence to the sacred services. Mother Tecla Afloarei who used to read "The Mercy of Virgin Mary" till she lost the light of her eyes. Mother Ana Netedu who loves to pray at the church and who used to read acatists for different problems of the people even when she was tired. The same were Mother Eupraxia Hoidrag, Mother Miropia Bruma, Mother Maria Pusnica – niece of the priest Paisie Olaru from Sihăstria, who lived her last years only with holy bread and holy water.

This is the Story of Saint George – Buciumeni Monastery that I together with Mother Superior had the pleasure and joy to write here for you all. It was a great impact for me to feel the rhythm of monastic life into this small community who sacrifices their body and souls for God and for our brothers in Jesus. It is appreciated the way a small church managed to be an important example for all the people. Here the history has continuity and sense for the present. It give us the assurance that we are on this earth since ancient times.

Here I lived the feeling that tradition does not mean passing over, that what is old can be restored and can be just as new and useful like people and things of this century.

It is a place where the impossible can become possible, because through prayer and sacrificial work of these nuns, God came down here on Earth together hastily worker and helper with Mother Virgin Mary, with Saint George and with Saint Alexander, the holy patrons of this holy settlement.

