
Wholistic Ministry Brings Transformation in Gypsy Communities

By Mr. Cristi Petricioiu

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About four or five years ago I was doing some training in a far away city, helping a Baptist pastor to influence a Gypsy community. This was while I was employed by a large relief and development organization in the country. I traveled much in that time with an assistant in order to train and support this pastor, Mircea.

This pastor had a heart for the Gypsies (he is a Gypsy as well), and his Baptist church supported him in different ways to go and plant churches in Gypsy slums in a bigger city. He and his family were working in that area for a while with few results. One of our volunteers introduced us to Mircea and his family, telling us that what we teach is most suitable for this young ministry.

We contacted them and explained what kind of support we deliver and that we teach a wholistic approach for ministry. In 2004, with some hesitation, they agreed to partner with us for six months of training. We introduced them to concepts such as Luke 2:52 and Jesus' growth, God's grand agenda, the basis of a wholistic approach to ministry, seed projects, etc. We didn't do much in the community ourselves, but we were visiting this group of believers once a month.

In this time, we met the City Council and some of the influencing people from the Gypsy community who were attracted by these concepts as Mircea and his family were sharing their learning. All our efforts were leading towards a longer term partnership. Suddenly, my relief and development organization left Romania and our capacity to support these people decreased dramatically after only two months. We had to make the decision to stop the partnership, which included further plans and ways to support this Gypsy ministry, and stick only to training so that we could finish off our six-month training program. With God's support, we did.

We were very sad, because by the end of our training meetings the City Council invited us (through Mircea) to partner with them and Mircea's foundation in helping out the poor and Gypsy communities they had in the area. We had to deny it and explain why we had to do so. At this last meeting, we spent much time explaining and teaching Mircea, his son, and the rest of his family about seed projects and how God is able to multiply their little investment:

that with prayer, sewing seeds, and watering them, the harvest is set. Then we left, hearing from them or about them maybe once every year or two.

Recently, I was traveling with my friend and he told me that the trip was going to be long (about 9 hours by car) because we were going to make a detour to visit Mircea and his ministry. I was glad to have a chance to see them after so many years.

Being there I was surprised and touched to tears. Mircea received us well and was very emotional. I felt undeserving of his efforts to make us feel so welcome. But then I realized why he was acting like that. He started telling us about what they were doing after we had to leave them, back in 2004. They took the teaching very seriously and applied it in their ministry efforts.

Many things had happened: the most influencing Gypsy leader became Christian, and a few years later he went to be with the Lord. Mircea told me that it is important in Gypsy culture to fish for the big fish first then many will follow. He was so right! As soon as this leader repented and changed his life many followed. (This man was very memorable! We ate so much pork fat at his house one day ☺).

They planted two Pentecostal churches in two different areas around that city and one more is developing as I write this letter. Within these new church plants, Mircea taught wholistic ministry principles. I am only aware of a few examples but Mircea told me they are numerous.

- A younger person was addicted to alcohol and he was ruining his life as well as his family's lives. He heard the Gospel but didn't believe it until Mircea explained that God is interested not only in his soul but about his social status and needs now. Mircea also arranged with the City Hall (the community leaders had made Mircea Gypsy representative in this forum) to have this young man take some skill courses which were paid by the local administration. In a short time he was taught how to work in construction - finishing jobs in interiors. He became very good at it, eventually coming to the Lord, and found a legal contract to work abroad in the UK. He left and worked for few years, sending enough money home to help his family build a house and leave the shack they had as a home. His situation improved dramatically, enough to become noticed in his Gypsy community. That helped others lift themselves out of poverty as well, and many are now active members in their church. This man came back and now is a respected construction worker in his community, as well as one of the church leaders.
- The other example, as best I remember, is of a person who became handicapped at work. He is Gypsy too, but he had higher education. One day, an accident made him handicapped for life, or so many were saying. His status became worse every day: from a good salary to a handicapped state relying on government help; from having a job to becoming unemployed; from a normal working man to a wreck poorly cared for by his family. This pushed him to desolation and alcohol problems, and eventually he became crazy. Mircea heard about him and had his newly planted church from that community

get involved in this man's life, proclaiming the Gospel as well as demonstrating it through a wholistic approach. In a short time this man became Christian, regained his hopes, and understood that God wanted him to become an effective leader of his own community. While the accident left him with scalp and brain damage, the church prayed for him and he became healthy again—enough to go to seminary and finish it off with excellent grades. He is leading this church now, witnessing to so many about how God is working in his life.

So many examples of transformation have come from that area in the last five years that Mircea became known not only in his area but further away. While he was sharing these examples, he told me that he had just returned from a different area where he had been invited. I learned on the national news that this particular area had been a war zone between Gypsies and Hungarian ethnic groups for a long time, to the point where Hungarians were burning down homes of Gypsies and the last of the Gypsies were killing some of the local Hungarians. There was a lot of news coverage, and national authorities were concerned about that area.

Mircea was invited by the national ethnic (Gypsy) leaders to help them stop the fighting in that community. They had heard about his results in his community. Mircea went and spent a few weeks and helped them understand his approach: bringing transformation through the local church, using principles of wholistic ministry, from inside out as the Word of God does.

He got involved in the local church, talking to Gypsies as well as with Hungarian local people and shared how much God wanted them to reflect His glory in that community, working and worshiping together and not killing each other. Mircea managed to portray the reality of transformed people by the power of the Word of God and how God's Word, and only His Word, can change people and communities, replacing hatred with love, stealing with giving, etc.

Mircea was given a chance and was promised by the national Gypsy leaders that if his approach worked out they would help introduce these concepts at a national level in their area of influence, which includes more than 4 million people. It seems that it's working out because I have heard nothing more on the news about that area. Yes, it will take a long time, but he is on the right track! Keep him in prayer! The war zone is now more spiritual than physical!

On top of all of that, Mircea and some of the Gypsy leaders were invited to have a meeting with the presidential institution (be it the President or other councilors, I do not know) to expose in what ways they are going to deal with such ethnic conflicts in the near and far future. I couldn't believe it! But how could I not, because God is powerful and He is a wonderful and Mighty God!

I do not know what else has happened after this surprising meeting I had with Mircea, but as I find out I will send updates. I hope you are encouraged hearing how God is working using our and Mircea's limitations, but bringing forth such results that give Him glory!!

Finally, I have to acknowledge the impact of my Canadian friend, Paul Schnell, who was a long-term volunteer before leaving Romania in 2004. Even after leaving, however, his connection with Mircea and his son Ciprian was so strong that he continued coming almost every year on his own to help them. Paul came to understand wholistic ministry when he worked with us and he is the one keeping the fire burning in the hearts of these people. God has used him in great ways!

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