

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPIRITUAL SERVICES TO
SOLVING PROBLEMS IN CENTERS FOR THE
ELDERLY
(A FEW SUGGESTIONS AS PRACTICAL TOOLS)**

G. A. Fofiu

Gheorghe Adrian Fofiu,
Middle School no. 1 Buntesti,
Bihor County, Romania

Abstract: Based on the Maslow's pyramid of human needs the author mention another need which is not mentioned by Maslow – the spiritual need. It is the rol of the priest and the church to opperate shelters for the elderly. They are presented several recommendations to improve the priest help accorded to the suffering elder people. The quality of social work, combined with that of priest can help increase the assisted people's quality of life, by simultaneous action on meeting physical needs and spiritual of older people faced with the close spectrum of a life's sunset.

Key words: human needs, spiritual needs, Christian Church, shelters for elderly, role of the priest

“Abraham Maslow, exponent of humanistic psychology has provided a typology of human needs and hierarchy of them according to their priority in motivating human behavior” (Sorescu, 2010, p. 361).

The pyramid of needs drawn up by Maslow includes five categories of human needs: physiological needs, security needs, needs of love, affection and belonging needs, esteem needs, self-actualization needs (Zamfir, 1997, pp. 78-79).

Great absence from Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is spiritual needs of an individual. Given that the whole Christian Church and the Orthodox Church in particular, because we refer in this paper, involved in social services, without issuing these spiritual needs, in the following, we formulated some recommendations of a spiritual for sustainability of social services especially by the Church, pointing in the next subsections and chapters the good practices in social services offered by certain social centers operating in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Based on knowledge of the physical characteristics and psycho-emotional of older people as well as to the effects revealed by the spiritual adviser own experience and discussions with other priests, I think that in situations of this kind, several recommendations can be made, which can contribute to improve the efficiency of the priest who operates shelters for the elderly:

- The mission of a priest serving in retirement homes or in residential care for older people is not easy as it might appear at first sight. It must be aware from the start that his mission in such philanthropic centers will never be rewarded by people, but certainly will receive reward from God and from the own conscience and belief.

- First of all, the priest must know very well his Christians, especially those who face difficulties, even if they are few, and vice versa: the grandparents too, need to know very well thir spiritual shepherd. In this multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurse, psychologist, psychotherapist, social worker and priest must work and cooperate closely. Assisted persons must be approached not as a file or an amount of data and information, but as a brother, like a close friend who needs our help and care, and that we must respect the dignity and personality of its own. He is the body, the human body, but also the soul, and diseases are often not only somatic, but also spiritual in nature. When these conditions are met then the nurse-employee

relationship is based on mutual feelings of respect, solidarity, empathy and collaboration.

- It should be noted that the priest of such a center should have access to each supported file even if the data and information herein is confidential. However they will be kept for him and will not be disclosed to a third party. In this way the priest will know more essential data about each person, about its past life issues, family members, caregivers, and so on, so as a playable from a social inquiry. If that dossier is submitted to the Municipality Social Services the future assisted belongs, it should contain a recommendation from the parish priest (regardless of religion), it would mean a lot to the spiritual profile of the person who steps into his new residence, being a solid starting point for spiritual shepherd in the center.

- For elderly care centers under the auspices of the Church, irrespective of the (Orthodox, Catholic, or other worship), is very importance that the building in question should be allocated space for a chapel or even a corner for prayer, where assisted persons can dialogue with the Divinity. They will become aware thereby that inner peace, and peace of soul will be able to find there at any time of day or night. In these chapels will be received believers of other confession than the majority in full tolerance, and Christian love. In case they refuse, they are free to attend religious services in the cult they belong, and if they cannot move because of health problems the manager oh the center will take action and contact a representative of that confession, who will be allowed to have access to the believer applicant to provide spiritual support.

- It is very useful as the chapel door or a a prominent place to display divine services program, which will be announced periodically by the priest servant, so that all the assisted see it. The time spent officiating church services should not be long one, a boring one, but be concise and simple. It is mandatory that the chapel will be equipped with comfortable chairs, for

during the religious services the assisted could sit on, the ladies on the left and men on the right, to respect the ordinances of the church.

- If the priest has musical skills he could organize a small vocal group to sing and give answers to the Divine Liturgy, to learn many church hymns appropriate to different times during the year. During the they could organize rehearsals, and on Sundays and holidays to implement what they have learned. In this way they would feel useful and involved in the liturgical life of the community to which they belong, and they would get attached both of a priest and their "the small church", where each one of them set has its place.

- Another important aspect is that the priest must excel the Confession seat. He must make his parishioners aware of the the importance of the holy Mysteries and urge them to get closer to it. Here the priest keeps in the hand the penitent's soul and can heal and soothe wounds unhealed, can restore hope for the fallen into depression, especially, can win a soul for God. There are four times in the year when it is appropriate to practice this confession of sins, and whenever necessary, when the assisted requires it and when he feels to do so.

- The celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Unction recommended to those who suffer from physical and spiritual disease, where prayers are spoken very expressive, powerful, for healing, purification and relieving suffering. Moreover, in this celebration, participants can bring different garments to be greased with oil sanctified and subsequently worn piety.

- The priest must take care of the assisted persons rooms, adorning them with an icon or holy cross, a prayer book or a Bible printed in larger characters, so that seniors can easily read without getting tired.

- It is also recommended that before each meal served in the cafeteria the priest (if present) or one of the assistants, preferably a man to utter a prayer (the Our Father), to which all present to attend with piety. After the meal, they should at least be used to make the sign of the Holy Cross, in gratitude to God. And as I mentioned something about the meal, it would be

preferable for the priest to suggest the manager of the institution that on every Wednesday and Friday of each week to serve at the cafeteria only vegetal food (no meat, milk, cheese and eggs). This habit can become beneficial to all the assisted persons not just in terms of bodily health, but in spiritual health. And to mark the period of specific spiritual preparation, the first and last week of the two major events - (the Easter and Christmas) would be recommended that the service menu to include only vegetarian food. Of course here we ought to specify that the church exempts the elderly, the sick, those who perform heavy work and children up to seven years. from the preparation I mentioned before. Those who cannot do that preparation, it's good to be exhorted to pray more for them through the exercise of communication with divinity, somehow to fill the gap of preparation to become ready for those major events.

- Another aspect of the priest's charity work is pastoral visits. It is a practice that pays off in the short and medium term, after which you can feel the pulse of the dwellers in that center. For each of the assisted people is a joy when the priest steps into their living room, they communicate very fluently in this way because they feel "at home". I think this meeting can occur early in the evening, possibly after serving dinner at decent hour. Here the priest can find more news can be informed of the spiritual doubts or problems that may find immediate solutions, even if they are purely administrative. Within their familiar environment people open out easier and tell their sorrows without too much hesitation.

- Of great impact for people assisted to the extent that they are fit to travel, are those pilgrimages to monasteries or trips to various places rich in history and culture. If the pilgrimage is well prepared and organized, it will achieve its purpose: to convey a spiritual euphoria for all those taking part in it. It is beneficial for the elders psychic from the institution, because they can "get away" from the monotony of everyday life, they can see places that they never dreamed to see on account of inevitable clashes with the material side

of their existence. They can now live unique experiences which will deeply mark them in a good way: attending a special service that is made at the monastery, listening to completely different songs, dining to the specific monastic refectory, visiting the museum and other spaces permitted, a word of spiritual benefit from a high ecclesiastic, a small gift got there that gets the value of the symbol, etc. They can also acquire various souvenirs, from books and religious objects to any objects that remind them about the tour. Anyway impressions of travel and the new information perceived will be subsequently sent to those "at home", to the assisted colleagues who for various reasons couldn't come, and will be the subject of serious discussion for some time.

- Also, as part of religious services to the more particular occasions, the priest from the center may invite different personalities from ecclesial life: bishops, monks, theology professors, fellow priests to officiate in common divine services, and the guests to speak words of appropriate instruction to the audience. Finally, if time will permit, they may have a meal with the assisted people or, more importantly, to visit them in their rooms and to cheer them up , to communicate with them and to transmit them edifying words.

I think that in this way, the quality of social work, combined with that of priest can help increase the assisted people's quality of life, by simultaneous action on meeting physical needs and spiritual of older people faced with the close spectrum of a life's sunset.

Bibliography:

- [1] Sorescu, E. M., (2010), *Social assistance for the elderly*, in Doru Buzducea (coord.), *Social care for groups at risk*, Polirom Publishing Company, Iași, pp. 327-392.
- [2] Zamfir, E., (1997), *Social Psychology - chosen texts*, Ankarom Publishing Company, Iași.
- [3] www.patriarhia.ro