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Priest Ioan Oniga as a Restorer of the Spiritual Life in the Parish of Aiud II. The Pastoral and Missionary Profile of the Venerable Clergyman

Abstract

The pastoral, missionary, and administrative work of the Aiud II Parish took on a new dimension with the appointment of Priest Ioan Oniga as parish priest in 1964. The fruitful priestly ministry he had previously carried out in the parishes he served provided the worthy clergyman with the necessary experience to foster spiritual life in the ancient citadel of Hungarian culture.

In Aiud, Priest Ioan Oniga completed the restoration and beautification of the imposing parish church, a long-held aspiration of the local Orthodox community. Furthermore, his commitment to cultural and religious matters and his efforts to counter sectarian proselytism were two of Priest Ioan Oniga's most significant endeavors.



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His support for the Central Missionary Fund and his material assistance to other communities within the Diocese confirmed the social and philanthropic commitment of the worthy spiritual pastor of Aiud. At the same time, his intellectual capacity was evident in his thorough preparation of topics for the orientation conferences held at the headquarters of the Aiud Deanery. Furthermore, through his "rotational" ministry in the city of Aiud, Priest Ioan Oniga expanded his fruitful missionary and pastoral work, proving himself a worthy spiritual shepherd and guide for the entire Orthodox community in Aiud. Last but not least, his appointment as a member of the Diocesan Assembly served as recognition of his rich priestly ministry.

Keywords

Priest Ioan Oniga, Orthodox Parish Aiud II, pastoral, social, and missionary work, proselytism

1 Introduction

The clergy and faithful of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish have weathered numerous trials and tribulations over the first four decades of the church's canonical existence, following the establishment of its administrative structure in 1922. Being deprived of a parish church for more than three decades was a major stumbling block to revitalizing pastoral and missionary work within the first Orthodox community in the city of Aiud. The construction of a representative place of worship was the main objective of generations of Orthodox believers in Aiud. However, the lack of necessary funds prevented the community from initiating and sustaining the operations required to complete all the construction and beautification work on the church.

Starting in November 1964, with the appointment of Priest Ioan Oniga as parish priest, the pastoral-missionary and administra-

tive-management activities took on a new dimension within the Aiud II Parish. From the very beginning, the new spiritual shepherd took the necessary steps to continue and complete the construction of the new church in Aiud. With the generous support of the faithful and higher authorities, Priest Ioan Oniga made a significant effort toward the major restoration and interior painting of the Aiud II Parish church. This project focused almost exclusively on the labor of the venerable parish priest during the first decade of his ministry. All these efforts culminated in the consecration service of the church, held on October 27, 1974.

In this study, entitled "Priest Ioan Oniga as a Restorer of the Spiritual Life in the Parish of Aiud II. The Pastoral and Missionary Profile of the Venerable Clergyman", we aim to uncover and present the pastoral and missionary activities carried out by Priest Ioan Oniga, alongside his extraordinary efforts to fulfill the centuries-old aspiration of the parishioners of Aiud II Parish: the construction and consecration of the church in the city center. In this regard, we will pay special attention to the pastoral-missionary work carried out by the worthy parish priest to promote the true faith within the community he shepherded. Thus, we aim to highlight the pastoral tact of Priest Ioan Oniga, as well as the mission that the parish priest of the Aiud II Parish fulfilled in relation to the local hierarchs and the priests of the Diocese.

2 The fruitful ministry of Priest Ioan Oniga in the communities he previously served. His efforts in completing the restoration work on the church of the Aiud II Parish

The fulfillment of a long-held aspiration of generations of believers in the Aiud II Orthodox Parish, namely the decoration and consecration of the parish church, was made possible by the

tireless efforts of Priest Ioan Oniga, the spiritual shepherd of the community since 1964. The venerable clergyman distinguished himself through his devotion and apostolic zeal in serving the ancestral Church even during his previous pastorates, in the villages of Dipșa and Iuda (today, Viile Tecii, Bistrița-Năsăud County), as well as in the localities of the Teaca district, belonging to the Diocese of Vad, Feleac, and Cluj. As Archimandrite Varahiil Jitaru would later remark during the consecration service of the Aiud II Parish church, in the two aforementioned previous parishes, Priest Ioan Oniga carried out and expanded numerous pastoral works "of genuine public resonance"¹, by conducting catechesis and lectures and strengthening the religious and moral life of the parishioners. Furthermore, despite adverse social and material conditions, he promoted Orthodox Christian teachings responsibly and wisely, efforts that significantly increased the number of believers attending divine services. At the same time, he made considerable efforts to make the most of the material resources in those parishes, equipping the places of worship with everything necessary for divine worship².

Regardless of the political context and the circumstances of the time, Priest Ioan Oniga continued his missionary, pastoral, and administrative work with great self-sacrifice. During the delicate period following the Vienna Dictate (August 30, 1944), the worthy minister remained steadfastly by his parishioners' side, uncompromising, calm, vigilant, and prudent, resembling in every way the spiritual shepherd who "lays down his life for his

¹ Arhiva Parohiei Ortodoxe Aiud II [Archive of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish] (hereinafter, the abbreviation "APOA II" will be used), Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru, paroh în Ocna Mureș, cu ocazia sfințirii bisericii din Aiud* [A toast delivered by Archimandrite Varahiil Jitaru, parish priest in Ocna Mureș, on the occasion of the consecration of the church in Aiud], October 27, 1974, unregistered document, p. 1.

² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, p. 1.

sheep" (John 10:11). As a teacher in the village of Iuda, he supported, alongside his priestly ministry, the restoration of the Primary School building and the Town Hall, vigorously revitalizing cultural activities. Here, he formed a mixed youth choir, ably fostering social life. Furthermore, as a missionary priest in several localities within the Teaca district – an administrative unit in Mureș County (between the wars) where no fewer than 25 communes had an overwhelming majority of "returned" Orthodox Christians (former Greek Catholics) –, the worthy spiritual shepherd Ioan Oniga advocated "for the unshakable unity of priests and believers of the same origin, language, and culture", namely for the preservation and strengthening of the confessional unity of Romanians, in the context of the Reunification of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania in the fall of 1948³. For his outstanding pastoral, missionary, and administrative work in the communities under his care, Priest Ioan Oniga was held up as a model of ministry by Archbishop Teofil Herineanu on October 12, 1960⁴.

The pastoral-missionary and administrative-managerial talents of the worthy minister Ioan Oniga also bore fruit within the Aiud II Orthodox Parish, where he served with dedication and apostolic zeal beginning on November 1, 1964. The restoration and beautification of the parish church dedicated to "Saints Michael and Gabriel the Archangels" and "The Three Hierarchs" constituted the primary and most significant administrative and managerial undertaking carried out by Priest Ioan Oniga. The parish priest of the Aiud community understood from the outset the urgent need to begin the finishing work on the imposing church building in the city center, thus applying all his previously demonstrated skill and expertise in the service of fulfilling the

³ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, pp. 2-3.

⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, p. 3.

long-held aspiration of so many generations of believers in the first Orthodox Parish of Aiud. "From all this, one can see his zealous spirit, poured out into great, prestigious, and enduring works, just as a good tree is known by its fruit"⁵, Archimandrite Varahiil Jitaru's commendation regarding the remarkable work of Priest Ioan Oniga, dated October 27, 1974. The parish priest of the ancient citadel of Hungarian culture was supported and encouraged by his parishioners, "who understood him, loved him, followed him, and supported him unreservedly throughout this demanding work of modern restoration of the monument (i.e., the church)"⁶.

The exceptional dedication of Priest Ioan Oniga to completing the finishing work on the Cathedral in Aiud was also highlighted by Aron Stîncel in his capacity as the first trustee of the Aiud II Parish. In his words of thanks and gratitude delivered during the church's consecration service, the representative of the Parish Council highlighted the deep commitment shown by Priest Ioan Oniga throughout the project:

"His Reverence, through his inventory of all the parish's assets, through his thoroughly prepared sermons, and with great devotion, delivered through his work of explaining things person to person, house to house, has succeeded, little by little, in convincing the faithful who were waiting to embrace the new church life and to step with confidence into the bosom of the ancestral Church"⁷.

⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, p. 3.

⁶ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, p. 1.

⁷ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Cuvânt de mulțumire al episcopului I, Aron Stîncel, adus ostenitorilor renovării bisericii Catedrale din Aiud, județul Alba, cu prilejul sfințirii* [A word of thanks from trustee I, Aron Stîncel, to those who worked on the renovation of the cathedral church in Aiud, Alba County, on the occasion of its consecration], October 27, 1974, document registered under No. 151/1974, p. 2.

In addition, trustee I Aron Stîncel emphasized that the parish priest of the Aiud community also contributed physically to accelerating the restoration and decoration of the church: "Priest Ioan Oniga was the one who worked day and night, both physically and intellectually, to carry out the proposed plan, the renovation and painting of this church"⁸.

Throughout the work carried out at the parish church, the worthy minister Ioan Oniga demonstrated pastoral tact and diplomacy in his dealings with both parishioners and those outside the community who provided support and financial assistance. Trustee I Aron Stîncel noted the pastor's skill and the dedication he demonstrated during the construction work on the church building:

"Over the six years that the work lasted, His Reverence, through wise and well-reasoned words, managed to secure significant aid for our parish. [...] The effort made by priest Oniga is unique in the history of this parish, because none of us, and perhaps no other priest, would have dared to undertake such a grand plan"⁹.

In this regard, the representative of the Parish Council once again highlighted the persuasive power of Priest Ioan Oniga, noting at the same time the significant increase in the number of worshippers attending the divine services, as a result of the fruitful missionary and pastoral ministry of the worthy priest: "Herein lies the great merit of Priest Ioan Oniga, in that he knew how to convince us to accept the renovation plan, assuring us that we would be able to cover the necessary expenses"¹⁰.

⁸ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Cuvânt de mulțumire al episcopului I, Aron Stîncel*, p. 3.

⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Cuvânt de mulțumire al episcopului I, Aron Stîncel*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Cuvânt de mulțumire al episcopului I, Aron Stîncel*, p. 3.

Priest Ioan Oniga's pastoral and missionary work bore fruit from the very beginning of his ministry among the congregation of Aiud II Parish, leading to a significant increase in the number of parishioners attending the divine services: "In 1964, church attendance was low. In a short time, the number of believers grew, and the bond of the Reunification of the Church was strengthened"¹¹, as emphasized by trustee I Aron Stîncel in his remarks delivered at the conclusion of the consecration service for the place of worship. The statement by the representative of the Diocesan Council effectively confirmed a detail noted in the history of the Aiud II Parish, compiled shortly before the solemn moment of the church's consecration:

"In 1964, upon taking over the leadership of this parish, His Grace, Priest Ioan Oniga, through his efforts in preaching the word of God and through well-considered pastoral tact, succeeded in increasing year by year the number of faithful attending the holy services"¹².

Archimandrite Varahiil Jitaru, during the consecration service of the Aiud II Parish church, paid tribute to Priest Ioan Oniga: "Everywhere he guides, unites, builds up, and strengthens, leaving a legacy of merit and intense pastoral activity"¹³.

¹¹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Cuvânt de mulțumire al episcopului I, Aron Stîncel*, p. 3.

¹² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Istoricul înființării Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Aiud II și al zidirii bisericii Catedrale din centrul orașului Aiud* [The History of the Establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II and the Construction of the Cathedral in Downtown Aiud], October 15, 1974, document registered under No. 133/1974, p. 3.

¹³ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Toast rostit de P.C. Sa Părintele Arhimandrit Varahiil Jitaru*, p. 1.

3 Priest Ioan Oniga – a follower of cultural and religious advancement and of countering sectarian proselytizing activities

Priest Ioan Oniga also showed a deep concern for the cultural enrichment of his parishioners. In accordance with the instructions of representatives from the Diocesan Center in Sibiu, the parish priest of the Aiud II Parish established subscriptions to various periodicals, such as *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, *Revista Muzeelor*, or *Revista Arhivelor*, in early 1973¹⁴. Through their content, these publications were intended to effectively support scientific research in the cultural and educational spheres, thereby supplementing church publications. In addition, the periodic inventory of the parish library¹⁵, as well as its restructuring¹⁶, highlights the reverend priest's commitment to this cause. Last but not least, the reorganization of the church shop, aimed at streamlining the distribution and sale of candles, was another key aspect that the parish Priest Ioan Oniga managed with great care. Its collection was periodically expanded with various books and church items, purchased from the Diocesan Center in Sibiu or from Alba Iulia.

¹⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Ministerului de Interne – Filiala Arhivelor Statului, Județul Alba, către Parohia Ortodoxă Română Aiud II* [Letter from the Ministry of the Interior – State Archives Branch, Alba County, to the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II], January 13, 1973, document registered under no. 11/1973, document registered by the Ministry of the Interior – State Archives Branch, Alba County, under no. 12/1973, p. 1.

¹⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiu Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], February 13, 1973, document registered under No. 14/1973, p. 1.

¹⁶ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Cooperativa de Consum Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Aiud Consumer Cooperative], November 1, 1973, document registered under No. 108/1973, p. 1.

For example, in 1974, at the initiative of Priest Ioan Oniga, the Aiud II Orthodox Parish received, from the Cathedral of Reunification and Coronation in the old citadel of Bălgrad, 1,000 small icons (in color) depicting the Holy Hierarchs Ilie Iorest and Sava Brancovici, as well as the Holy Confessors Visarion, Sofronie, and Oprea¹⁷. By promoting these Romanian saints among the faithful of Aiud, Priest Ioan Oniga sought to keep alive the work of consolidating the reunification of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș that began in 1948, to defend the ancestral faith so earnestly preached by the aforementioned saints who carried out their ministry in the lands of Transylvania during the 17th and 18th centuries. At the same time, by acquiring copies bearing the images of the Holy Hierarchs Ilie Iorest and Sava Brancovici and of the Holy Confessors Visarion, Sofronie, and Oprea, the priest of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish wished to provide financial and material support to the Cathedral of Reunification and Coronation in Alba Iulia¹⁸.

Priest Ioan Oniga showed particular concern for countering the proselytizing efforts of neo-Protestant sects within the

¹⁷ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protosinghelului Modest Muraru, conducătorul Catedralei Reîntregirii din Alba Iulia, către Oficiul Parohial Aiud II* [Letter from Protosinghel Modest Muraru, head of the Cathedral of Reunification in Alba Iulia, to the Aiud II Parish Office], March 4, 1974, document registered under No. 27/1974, 1. See also APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protosinghelului Modest Muraru, conducătorul Catedralei Reîntregirii din Alba Iulia, către Prea Cucernicul Părinte Ioan Oniga, paroh al Parohiei Aiud II* [Letter from Protosinghel Modest Muraru, head of the Cathedral of Reunification in Alba Iulia, to the Most Reverend Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest of the Aiud II Parish], May 16, 1974, document registered under No. 48/1974, p. 1.

¹⁸ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Arhimandritului Emilian Birdaș, conducătorul Catedralei Reîntregirii din Alba Iulia, către P.C. Sa Părintele Ioan Oniga, paroh al Parohiei Aiud II* [Letter from Archimandrite Emilian Birdaș, coordinator of the Cathedral of Reunification in Alba Iulia, to Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest of the Aiud II Parish], March 3, 1973, document registered under No. 28/1973, p. 1.

community he served. Despite communist repression, representatives of other denominations continued their activities consistently, prioritizing conversions through privately conducted initiatives in the homes of certain parishioners. To reduce the likelihood of Orthodox believers straying from the true faith, the Aiud Deanery, between 1971 and 1973, initiated in all communities the acceleration and intensification of monitoring and investigative activities regarding the operations of neo-Protestant sects within each parish's jurisdiction. In this way, the aim was to accurately track the number of souls who had left the Orthodox faith and to identify the gathering places of converts to other denominations¹⁹. According to a report compiled by Priest Ioan Oniga in April 1971, 21 individuals belonging to neo-Protestant denominations were identified in the Aiud II Parish: 13 Seventh-day Adventists and eight of unknown affiliation. This statistical report was compiled by the parish priest, Ioan Oniga, based on information provided by the neighbors of neo-Protestant adherents, since the proselytizing activities were conducted in secret. Thus, the parish priest of the Aiud community noted that the actual number of believers who had left Orthodoxy might be different²⁰.

¹⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului ort. rom. Aiud către Oficiul Parohial Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Aiud II Parish Office], March 27, 1973, document registered under No. 29/1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 372/1973, p. 1.

²⁰ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Tabel despre sectele recunoscute și nerecunoscute din Parohia noastră, întocmit în conformitate cu ordinul Oficiului Protopopesc* [Table of recognized and unrecognized sects in our parish, compiled in accordance with the order of the Deanery Office], April 25, 1971, document registered under No. 34/1971, p. 1. The 13 Seventh-day Adventists from the Aiud II Orthodox Parish come from the Noian (two people), Bîcea (three), Cociș (two), Lăpădatu (two), Cociș – photographer (two), and Trăistătaru (two) families. In addition, the eight individuals whose affiliation could not be identified come from the Bujor family (six people) and the Sîrbu –

The pastoral and missionary work of Priest Ioan Oniga took on a new dimension as the intensification of proselytizing activities by representatives of neo-Protestant denominations intensified. Since the latter were distributing among the parishioners of Aiud II Parish various editions of the Bible with translations "foreign" to the spirit of the ancestral Church, used exclusively by the converts of other denominations, the parish priest of the Aiud community submitted a letter to Patriarch Justinian Marina requesting approval for the delivery of 20 copies of the Holy Scriptures from the 1972 edition series, printed by the Orthodox Biblical and Missionary Institute Press, as well as 5-10 copies of the Psalter. Highlighting the significant number of Neo-Protestant "propagandists" in Aiud, Priest Ioan Oniga emphasized that Neo-Protestant Bibles are translated in a biased manner, leading, through their content, to a misinterpretation of the true meaning of Orthodox doctrine. Thus, Priest Ioan Oniga emphasized the urgent need to intensify pastoral and missionary activity through the distribution of the Holy Scriptures: "The distribution of a large number of Bibles, published by the Holy Synod, which are in high demand in the city, would contribute to a more accurate interpretation of our orthodox teaching"²¹.

Furthermore, as a means of strengthening the true faith in Aiud, a town recognized as multi-denominational, home to a large number of coexisting nationalities, Priest Ioan Oniga appealed to Patriarch Justinian²² approval of the delivery of 150 icons

shoemaker family (two). See APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Tabel despre sectele recunoscute și nerecunoscute*, p. 1.

²¹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Preotului Stav. Ioan Oniga, parohul Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud, nr. 2, către Prea Fericitul Părinte Patriarh Justinian Marina* [Letter from Priest Stav. Ioan Oniga, parish priest of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud, No. 2, to His Beatitude Patriarch Justinian Marina], May 28, 1973, document registered under No. 54/1973, p. 1.

²² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Preotului Ioan Oniga, parohul Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Aiud, nr. 2, către Prea Fericitul Părinte Patriarh Justinian Marina* [Letter from Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest

depicting Jesus Christ the Savior (50), the Virgin Mary (50), and the Resurrection of the Lord (50), to be subsequently sent to the Biblical Institute, Printing Department²³. To this end, the parish priest of the Aiud community compiled a series of lists of parishioners who requested copies of the Holy Scriptures published by the Orthodox Biblical and Missionary Institute, as well as the aforementioned icons, through the Orthodox Deanery of Aiud²⁴. A similar request was sent to Patriarch Justinian Marina by the parish priest, Ioan Oniga, in the run-up to the consecration ceremony of the church of "Saints Michael and Gabriel the Archangels" and "The Three Hierarchs". The worthy spiritual shepherd of the Aiud community requested the Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church to approve, from the reserve stock, 30 copies of the Holy Scriptures, an edition published by the Orthodox Bible and Mission Institute, to be distributed to the faithful of the Aiud II Parish on the occasion of the consecration of the parish church on October 27, 1974²⁵.

of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud, No. 2, to His Beatitude Patriarch Justinian Marina], May 28, 1973, document registered under No. 46/1973, p. 1.

- ²³ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Pr. Ioan Oniga, parohul Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud, nr. 2, către Institutul Biblic, secția Tipografie* [Letter from Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud, No. 2, to the Biblical Institute, Printing Department], June 5, 1973, document registered under No. 50/1973, p. 1.
- ²⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Prea Cucernicul Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Most Reverend Priest Ioan Oniga], April 20, 1973, document registered under No. 42/1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 449/1973, p. 1.
- ²⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Pr. Stav. Ioan Oniga, parohul Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Aiud II, către Prea Fericitul Părinte Patriarh Justinian Marina* [Letter from Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II, to His Beatitude Patriarch Justinian Marina], undated document, document registered under No. 132/1974, p. 1.

4 Social and philanthropic dimensions in the ministry of Priest Ioan Oniga. The intellectual capacity of the spiritual shepherd of the Aiud II Parish

As the parish priest of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish, Priest Ioan Oniga devoted significant attention to social, philanthropic, and charitable activities, participating in both nationwide initiatives and efforts to support communities within the Diocese. Despite the difficult material and financial situation, it faced, the Orthodox community under the leadership of Priest Ioan Oniga joined the periodic fundraising efforts for the Central Missionary Fund, established in 1956 at the initiative of Patriarch Justinian²⁶. In the spring of 1971, in accordance with an order from the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, the Parish of Aiud II organized a collection to support the central administrative body responsible for promoting missionary, pastoral, and social-philanthropic activities within the Romanian Orthodox Church. As a result of the activities carried out on March 7 and 14, 1971, the first two Sundays of Great Lent, a total of 1,589 lei was raised and subsequently forwarded to the Orthodox Deanery of Aiud²⁷. Similar initiatives were also carried out, at the urging of the Holy Synod, during the corresponding liturgical seasons in 1973 and 1974, when donations from the faithful amounted to 1,500 lei (1,745 lei)²⁸, subsequently submitted to the Diocesan Center through the Aiud Deanery Office.

²⁶ Constantin Pârvu, *Patriarhul Justinian. Mărturii, fapte și adevăr* [Patriarch Justinian: Testimonies, deeds, and truth] (București: Basilica, 2017), p. 275.

²⁷ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], March 24, 1971, document registered under No. 26/1971, p. 1.

²⁸ The collection drive took place on March 3 and 10, 1974. See APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Proces verbal din ședința Comitetului Parohial al Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II cu ocazia terminării colectei pentru Fondul Central Misionar* [Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Committee of the

The reverend Priest Ioan Oniga and the faithful of the Aiud II Parish demonstrated their compassionate love through a new charitable initiative, this time in support of an Orthodox community in the village of Ucea de Jos, Făgăraș County (now Brașov County). Aware of the special importance of the support received over the years in completing the restoration and decoration of the churches of "Saints Michael and Gabriel the Archangels" and "The Three Hierarchs", the priest and parishioners of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish joined the effort to assist the community of the Ucea de Jos Orthodox Parish. On January 6, 1973, on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord²⁹, the faithful who attended the Holy and Divine Liturgy contributed through voluntary donations to support the aforementioned parish, specifically the ongoing work at the Orthodox church in the village of Ucea de Jos in the Făgăraș region. In the end, a total of 500 lei was raised, which was subsequently forwarded by the Council of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish to the Office of the Aiud Orthodox Deanery³⁰.

Priest Ioan Oniga's intellectual abilities were confirmed during the periodic orientation conferences for priests held in the Aiud Deanery. The worthy spiritual pastor of the Orthodox community in the ancient citadel of Hungarian culture was

Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II upon the conclusion of the collection for the Central Missionary Fund], March 10, 1974, document registered under No. 26/1974, p. 1.

²⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Proces verbal luat în ședința episcopilor finută cu ocazia colectei pentru Parohia Ucea de Jos, județul Făgăraș* [Minutes of the meeting of the church council held in connection with the collection for the Parish of Ucea de Jos, Făgăraș County], January 6, 1973, document registered under No. 3/1973, p. 1.

³⁰ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesesc Ortodox Român Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], January 15, 1973, document registered under No. 5/1973, p. 1.

repeatedly appointed to draft and present the conference theme, organized at the diocesan level. On November 24, 1971, Priest Ioan Oniga presented a lecture titled "The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Moral Guidance of the Faithful", in which he highlighted the main moral issues that concerned society at that time, the pastoral means for promoting morality, as well as aspects related to family life and attitudes in everyday social interactions³¹. Furthermore, on May 29, 1974, Priest Ioan Oniga wrote and presented a paper titled "The Sermon in Our Times". During the conference, the spiritual pastor of the Aiud community highlighted the importance of the Church's teaching ministry and emphasized the priest's duty to preach and proclaim the Gospel³². There are also records of Priest Ioan Oniga's participation in orientation conferences for priests, where topics of a national and patriotic nature were discussed³³,

³¹ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], October 25, 1971, document registered under no. 139/1971, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 1217/1971, pp. 1-2.

³² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Pr. Stavrofor Ioan Oniga, Parohia Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Rev. Stavrofor Ioan Oniga, Aiud II Parish], undated document, document registered under no. 47/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under no. 382/1974, pp. 1-2.

³³ I.V., "Chipul nou al Patriei" ["The New Face of the Homeland"], *Telegraful Român*, 37-40 (1969), p. 4. See also APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], April 30, 1971, document registered under No. 63/1971, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 555/1971, 1. See also APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], November 1, 1973, document registered under No. 114/1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 983/1973, p. 1; APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the

issues related to preserving the unity of the Church's doctrine³⁴, administrative, ecclesiastical, or financial matters³⁵, issues regarding the standardization of worship and communal singing in places of worship³⁶ or topics related to relations among religious denominations in Romania in the context of strengthening the unity of the Romanian people³⁷.

Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], July 12, 1974, document registered under No. 85/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 704/1974, p. 1.

- ³⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], February 28, 1971, document registered under No. 22/1971, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 257/1971, p. 1. See also APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], February 19, 1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 147/1974, pp. 1-2.
- ³⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], September 27, 1971, document registered under No. 137/1971, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 1119/1971, p. 1. See also APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Oficiu Parohial Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Aiud II Parish Office], January 22, 1973, document registered under No. 13/1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 58/1973, p. 1; APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], January 26, 1974, document registered under No. 11/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 78/1974, p. 1.
- ³⁶ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], February 27, 1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 244/1973, pp. 1-2.
- ³⁷ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], October 21, 1974, document

5 "Rotational" ministry - a driving force behind the expansion of Priest Ioan Oniga's missionary work at the local level. The sense of responsibility demonstrated in his pastoral work

Priest Ioan Oniga's pastoral and missionary work was not limited to the administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries of the Aiud II Parish. According to Ordinance No. 9834/1972 issued by Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin³⁸, the clergy serving in the Aiud area, specifically priest Emil Stoica of Aiud I Parish and Priest Ioan Oniga, parish priest of Aiud II Parish, took turns officiating on the last Sunday of each month at the church in the neighboring community³⁹. These missionary activities were undertaken to facilitate the exchange of pastoral experience among the parish priests of the city of Aiud⁴⁰. Each priest was required to prepare a monthly activity report, which was then submitted to the Aiud Deanery Office, containing details

registered under No. 127/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 1038/1974, p. 1.

³⁸ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Oficiul Parohial Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Aiud II Parish Office], January 15, 1974, document registered under No. 6/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 26/1974, p. 1.

³⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Parohia Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Parish of Aiud II], June 26, 1974, document registered under No. 82/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 657/1974, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Initially, in 1974, the Parish of Aiudul de Sus, led by Priest Vasile Trușă, was included in the "rotational" ministry system. The decision to "release" the Parish of Aiudul de Sus from the "rotation" ministry system was made during the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Archiepiscopal Council on February 19, 1974. See APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Parohia Aiudul de Sus* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Parish of Aiudul de Sus], February 25, 1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 1801/1974, p. 1.

regarding his ministry, such as the theme of the homily delivered during the Divine Liturgy⁴¹, the number of believers who confessed and received Holy Communion, the qualitative improvement in church singing and in the liturgical responses during services, as well as suggestions such as standardizing the liturgical order of the Parastas service⁴² or findings regarding sectarian proselytizing⁴³. For example, on April 28, 1974, on the Third Sunday after Easter, Priest Ioan Oniga celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of "Saint Nicholas" in the Parish of Aiud I. In the report he wrote a few days after his missionary work, Priest Ioan Oniga praised the spiritual atmosphere he found within the neighboring Orthodox community⁴⁴:

"On April 28, 1974, I went to the Aiud I Parish and celebrated the Divine Liturgy. The service began at 9:00 a.m. and lasted until 12:30 p.m. During the Divine Liturgy, I preached on the topic 'The Mission of the Christian Woman in Contemporary Society,' focusing on the dogmatic teaching in the Gospel reading and applying it to contemporary society. After the Divine Liturgy, three memorial services were celebrated, and a newborn infant was baptized, after which the Holy

⁴¹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], September 5, 1974, document registered under No. 108/1974, p. 1.

⁴² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], undated document, document registered under No. 46/1974, p. 1.

⁴³ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Oficiul Parohial Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Aiud II Parish Office], January 15, 1974, unregistered document, p. 1.

⁴⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud], May 8, 1974, document registered under No. 42/1974, p. 1.

Communion was distributed. Both the Divine Liturgy and the Memorial Service were conducted in an atmosphere of brotherly love among the clergy and the faithful participating. It was noted that, regarding the celebration of both the Divine Liturgy and the memorial service, the responses from the choir loft have improved significantly compared to the past and are increasingly well sung to the melodies of the Romanian Orthodox Church currently in use. Furthermore, the church was filled with believers, both men and women"⁴⁵. Priest Ioan Oniga's pastoral and missionary work took on various forms throughout his years of service within the Aiud community. In full obedience to his superiors, Priest Ioan Oniga took great care to strengthen the religious and moral foundations of his parishioners and, at the same time, to advance the Aiud II Parish culturally and administratively. In accordance with the guidance from Archpriest Liviu Silveșan, Priest Ioan Oniga was tasked with prudently managing the issue of mixed marriages to avoid the risk of alienating his own faithful from the true faith. In this regard, Priest Ioan Oniga was urged to act with responsibility and balance regarding the ecumenical movement, with the aim of effectively monitoring sectarian proselytism. Regarding financial administration, Priest Ioan Oniga received precise instructions on the proper presentation of financial accounts to avoid potential penalties. Last but not least, Priest Ioan Oniga was tasked with ensuring the proper organization of the distribution of icons and church books, so that they would be available for purchase by all the faithful⁴⁶, and, at the same time, to post the weekly schedule of religious services and a brief

⁴⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Oficiul Protopopesc ort. rom. Aiud*, May 8, 1974, p. 1.

⁴⁶ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], June 25, 1971, document registered under No. 102/1971, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 778/1971, p. 1.

history of the Aiud II Parish on the church door⁴⁷. For Priest Ioan Oniga, all of these guidelines served as sound principles for strengthening the pastoral mission and improving the efficiency of administrative and logistical activities carried out within the community.

One of Priest Ioan Oniga's primary missions was to foster communal singing and to contribute to the standardization of church music within the Aiud II Parish. According to a decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church (No. 3646) from 1973, the parish priest of the Aiud community, together with all the clergy of the Romanian Patriarchate, was tasked with preserving church music in its original form in cases where certain believers performed religious hymns outside of traditional ones and contrary to common practice. Thus, Priest Ioan Oniga was tasked with analyzing the causes of these manifestations foreign to the worship of the Orthodox Church and taking all appropriate measures regarding the proper conduct of liturgical services, under hierarchical guidance and in accordance with the pastoral means available to the Church. Particular attention was paid to the Army of the Lord movement, which had been banned during the communist regime, and specifically to the church music "reminiscences" characteristic of that religious group. In this regard, Priest Ioan Oniga was urged to carry out appropriate pastoral activities and deliver homilies of a suitably missionary nature during religious services, to encourage the members of the community to maintain the unaltered unity of church chant⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Parohia Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Parish of Aiud II], April 27, 1974, document registered under No. 81/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 297/1971, p. 1.

⁴⁸ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox

A particular focus of Priest Ioan Oniga was intensifying spiritual ministry during the Lenten season, leading up to Holy Easter. The reverend priest paid special attention to the cultural, catechetical, and liturgical events organized during the liturgical period preceding the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord. At the invitation of the Diocesan Center of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, on March 7, 1971, Priest Ioan Oniga and his parishioners were invited to take part in a truly special spiritual event. Among the Orthodox communities in Aiud, priest professor Dumitru Călugăr, a faculty member at the University-Level Theological Institute in Sibiu (teaching Homiletics and Catechetics), was present to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and deliver a sermon to the clergy and faithful of the city of Aiud. The organizers viewed this moment of spiritual communion as one of spiritual edification, intended to cultivate within the Orthodox communities "as many ecclesiastical and civic fruits as possible"⁴⁹.

6 Priest Ioan Oniga, elected to the Diocesan Assembly. Working with Vicar Bishop Emilian Birdaș-Rășinăreanu

The fruitful pastoral, missionary, administrative, and managerial work of Priest Ioan Oniga was validated, recognized, and reaffirmed on a new level, at the diocesan level, during the solemn consecration of the church of the Aiud II Parish. In the fall of 1974, specifically on November 7, Priest Ioan Oniga was appointed by the Priestly Electoral College of the Alba Iulia

Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], February 21, 1973, document registered under No. 15/1973, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 237/1973, p. 1.

⁴⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Documente pentru arhivă, 1971", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către P.C. Părinte Ioan Oniga* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to Priest Ioan Oniga], March 5, 1971, document registered under No. 23/1971, p. 1.

Electoral District to represent the church's administrative-electoral unit in the Diocesan Assembly of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu⁵⁰. The election took place at the church of the Annunciation in downtown Alba Iulia, in the presence of members of the Presbytery Electoral College; Priest Ioan Oniga was appointed to serve as the clerical representative for a four-year term⁵¹. Shortly thereafter, on December 1, 1974, Priest Ioan Oniga attended the first regular session of the Diocesan Assembly as a delegate to the central deliberative body of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu⁵².

Although he did not hold the administrative position of archpriest of the Orthodox Archpriesthood of Aiud, Priest Ioan Oniga attended numerous events in the life of the Diocese as a delegate of the Aiud Archpriest's Office, while also fostering a relationship of collaboration and cooperation with the local hierarchs. For example, on August 15, 1974, the parish priest of the Aiud II Orthodox Parish was present at the "Assumption of

⁵⁰ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Proces verbal încheiat de Colegiul Electoral Preoțesc Alba Iulia* [Minutes drawn up by the Alba Iulia Clergy Electoral College], November 7, 1974, document registered under No. 165/1974, 1. See also APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Protopopiatului Ortodox Român Aiud către Oficiul Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Aiud II* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Aiud to the Office of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II], October 22, 1974, document registered under No. 126/1974, document registered by the Aiud Deanery under No. 1040/1974, p. 1.

⁵¹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Mandat atribuit de Colegiul Electoral Preoțesc din Cercul Electoral Alba Iulia* [Mandate awarded by the Clerical Electoral College of the Alba Iulia Electoral District], November 7, 1974, document registered under No. 165-1/1974, p. 1.

⁵² APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Adresa Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Române de Alba Iulia și Sibiu, Secția administrativ-bisericească, înaintată Pr. Oniga Ioan* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, Administrative and Ecclesiastical Department, addressed to Rev. Oniga Ioan], November 15, 1974, document registered under No. 170/1974, document registered by the Diocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu under No. 11220/1974, p. 1.

God's Mother" Monastery in Râmeț, on the occasion of the patronal feast of the old church of the ancient monastic settlement at the foot of the Trascău Mountains. The Divine Liturgy on the feast day was celebrated by Bishop-Vicar Emilian Birdaș-Rășinăreanu of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, who also delivered the sermon. At the end of the service, Priest Ioan Oniga was honored to deliver a speech in the presence of Bishop Emilian and the crowds of faithful, alongside Protosinghel Dometie Manolache (Saint Dometie the Merciful of Râmeț), the spiritual priest of the monastic community⁵³.

In a confidential report submitted to Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin of Transylvania, Crișana, and Maramureș, Priest Ioan Oniga described, at the request of the Diocesan Secretary, the manner in which the funeral service for priest Marian Breazu of the Mihalț Parish, Aiud Deanery, was conducted. The funeral service was held on August 12, 1973, by a group of 16 clergymen, including Priest Ioan Oniga. At the urging of Archpriest Liviu Silveșan of the Aiud Deanery, the parish priest of the Aiud II Parish delivered a sermon titled "The Priesthood and the role of the priest as teacher, spiritual shepherd, and leader", applying it to the life and ministry of the clergyman who had passed into eternity⁵⁴. Furthermore, as a delegate of the Aiud Deanery, Priest Ioan Oniga presided over the extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council of the Ocna Mureș I Parish on February 10, 1974. The meeting, held after the Divine Liturgy in the office of the Ocna Mureș I Parish, addressed administrative issues arising from the retirement of priest A. Ciurdăreanu and, at the same

⁵³ "Informații" ["Information"], *Telegraful Român*, 37-38 (1974), p. 3.

⁵⁴ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Parohiei ort. rom. Aiud II către Înalt Prea Sfințitul Părinte Nicolae Mladin (confidențial)* [Letter from the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Aiud II to His Eminence Bishop Nicolae Mladin (confidential)], undated document, document registered under No. 70/1973, pp. 1-2.

time, the submission of proposals and suggestions for filling the vacant parish position⁵⁵.

The reverend Priest Ioan Oniga worked closely with Bishop Emilian Birdaș, Vicar Bishop of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu from September 1973 to January 1976, who later became the first Bishop of the reestablished Orthodox Diocese of Alba Iulia⁵⁶. Hailing from villages located about 20 km apart, Priest Ioan Oniga from the village of Poiana Blenchii (Sălaj County), and Bishop Emilian Birdaș from the village of Rohia ("Țara Lăpușului", Maramureș County), the bond between the parish priest of the Aiud II Parish and Vicar Bishop Emilian had been cultivated since the hierarch, as Archimandrite, served as the head of the Cathedral of Reunification in Alba Iulia⁵⁷. On the occasion of his election to the office of Auxiliary Bishop, on June 11, 1973, Priest Ioan Oniga sent Bishop Emilian Birdaș a congratulatory message in which he expressed his joy at the "elevation to the rank of Bishop of the first scion from the rugged forests of the Lăpuș hills"⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1974", *Convocator privind ședința extraordinară a Consiliului Parohial al Parohiei ort. rom. Ocna Mureș I* [Notice of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Ocna Mureș I], February 10, 1974, document registered under No. 15/1974, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Nicolae Bolea, Virgil Bolea, *Episcopul Emilian și reînființarea scaunului vlădicesc de la Alba Iulia* [Bishop Emilian and the Reestablishment of the Bishopric of Alba Iulia] (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2016), pp. 92, 131.

⁵⁷ N. Bolea, V. Bolea, *Episcopul Emilian*, pp. 70-82.

⁵⁸ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Preotului Ioan Oniga către Prea Sfințitul Părinte Emilian Birdaș* [Letter from Priest Ioan Oniga to His Eminence Emilian Birdaș], July 6, 1973, document registered under No. 161/1973, p. 1. Also, during 1973, parish Priest Ioan Oniga sent congratulatory messages to Bishop Justinian Marina, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his enthronement as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (on which occasion he presented the Primate of our Church with an icon depicting the Transylvanian Holy Confessors Visarion, Sofronie, and Oprea), and to Hierarch Teoctist Arăpașu, on the

In a letter addressed to Bishop Emilian on July 6, 1973, parish Priest Ioan Oniga expressed his willingness to continue fostering a lasting relationship of cooperation for the advancement of the ancestral Church:

"I would like you to count me among your closest associates. [...] I hope that our shared roots will create a new framework for collaboration and that you will continue to see in my humble person a servant of the Orthodox Church. [...] I am ready to stand at your disposal to steer the ship of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church into calmer waters, to create a new atmosphere of relaxation and brotherhood"⁵⁹.

Subsequently, in connection with his ordination as bishop and installation into his new office, which took place on September 12, 1973, Bishop Emilian sent a letter of thanks to Priest Ioan Oniga for the message he had previously sent:

"I am deeply touched by the congratulations and good wishes extended on the occasion of my ordination and installation as Auxiliary Bishop. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and assure you of even greater zeal in the service of the Church"⁶⁰.

occasion of his installation as Metropolitan of Oltenia. See APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Preotului stavr. Ioan Oniga către Prea Fericitul Părinte Justinian Marina* [Letter from ArchPriest Ioan Oniga to His Beatitude Justinian Marina], undated document, document registered under No. 75/1973, p. 1; APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Telegramă înaintată de Pr. Ioan Oniga Înalt Prea Sfințitului Teoctist, Mitropolitul Olteniei* [Telegram sent by Priest Ioan Oniga to His Eminence Teoctist, Metropolitan of Oltenia], undated document, unregistered document, p. 1.

⁵⁹ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Preotului Ioan Oniga către Prea Sfințitul Părinte Emilian Birdaș* [Letter from Priest Ioan Oniga to His Eminence Emilian Birdaș], July 6, 1973, unregistered document, p. 1.

⁶⁰ APOA II, Dosar "Arhivă 1973", *Adresa Episcopului-vicar Emilian al Arhiepiscopiei de Alba Iulia și Sibiu către Preacucernicia sa părintele Ioan Oniga* [Letter from Bishop Emilian, Vicar of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, to the Reverend Priest Ioan Oniga], undated document, document registered under No. 94/1973, p. 1.

Conclusions

From the early years of his priestly ministry, Priest Ioan Oniga stood out for his pastoral devotion and apostolic zeal, carrying out numerous missionary and cultural-catechetical works among the Orthodox communities in the localities of Dipșa and Iuda. Also, in the aforementioned communities, the worthy priest enthusiastically supported educational activities, thereby fostering the flourishing of social life through numerous cultural activities. Last but not least, Priest Ioan Oniga campaigned for the confessional unity of the clergy and believers in the Teaca area in the context of the Reunification of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania.

The missionary zeal of the cleric Ioan Oniga bore fruit, particularly within the Aiud II Parish. The restoration and finishing of the church "Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel" and "Holy Three Hierarchs" represented the most important administrative and household work of the worthy parish priest. Priest Ioan demonstrated pastoral tact and diplomacy with the parishioners, who supported him during the restoration work on the place of worship. This fact led to a significant increase in the number of believers attending the holy services.

Priest Ioan Oniga proved to be a responsible militant in terms of the cultural-religious prosperity of the faithful he shepherded, often concerned with enriching the parish library's book collection or distributing icons among the parishioners. A special concern of the worthy parish priest was countering the proselytism of neo-Protestant cults within the community he shepherded, distributing, for missionary-pastoral purposes, numerous copies of the Holy Scripture printed under the aegis of the Orthodox Church.

Despite the delicate material and financial situation of the Aiud II Parish, Priest Ioan Oniga joined, without reservation, the social-philanthropic actions carried out at the regional or national level, organizing financial collections to support the

Central Missionary Fund or materially supporting works within other parish communities in the Diocese. Concurrently with the missionary-pastoral and administrative activities, Priest Ioan Oniga supported the topic of priestly orientation conferences in the Aiud Deanery on several occasions, thus confirming his intellectual capacity.

The missionary activity of Priest Ioan Oniga was not limited to the territorial perimeter of the Aiud II Parish. During the period 1972-1974, the worthy parish priest joined the "rotational" service action, carried out at the level of the city of Aiud, celebrating mass and preaching periodically at the church of the Aiud II Parish. At the same time, Priest Ioan Oniga responsibly managed various pressing pastoral-missionary aspects, such as the problem of mixed marriages and sectarian proselytism, the organization of church canvassing, or the cultivation of communal singing at religious services.

In recognition of the fruitful pastoral and administrative activity demonstrated in the Aiud II Parish, Priest Ioan Oniga was elected a member of the Diocesan Assembly of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, as a representative of the Alba Iulia Electoral Circle. He also maintained a working relationship with the local hierarchs, often participating, as a delegate of the archpriest of Aiud, in important events in the life of the Archdiocese or the Diocese. Priest Ioan Oniga was among the collaborators of hierarch Emilian Birdaș, given the two clerics' geographical proximity in their localities of origin.

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