

Nou, Advent 2020

Dear friends,

„Goooooal!“ Shouts and cheers, excited children spring to their feet and clap. Twelve-year-old Claudiu has scored the all-deciding goal. The ELIJAH team has won the football tournament. The weather has gotten cold, but Nou’s children and teenagers cluster around our new sports ground. Football most of all, but karate lessons, dance and music group rehearsals are also held here. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, we may no longer conduct them indoors. Thus, the field is full of life all day and the village youth play football at the weekends.

The distancing rules do restrict daily life a lot, but luckily we have large rooms in the Social Centre Casa Martin and we can continue with homework assistance, kindergarten, nursery care and music lessons. In the forenoon, the teachers and pupils of the village school come over to us because their own classrooms are too cramped. After the long interruption starting in March, lessons could thus resume in September. Nou is one of the few places in which that is possible. It used to be the most ill-famed village in the district: almost no children attended school and they had the lowest average grades. Now we count among the best! The school director is full of gratitude. The village has blossomed. Sports ground, social centre and music school have become places that radiate life, joy and love.

Our football star Claudiu is waiting at the exit, as he does every evening. The wait doesn’t bother him today, he and his friends are still bathing in the flush of victory. At last his siblings appear. As the eldest, he must take them home. There are seven of them, the smallest is one and a half years old. Home: that is a small hovel at the end of the village. They all sleep in two beds in one room together with their mother Cristina. Cristina had her first child when she turned sixteen. Like all the girls, she was matched with a man – whether she wanted to or not – and had to make the best of it. With no training and no job, it was impossible for her to escape the vicious circle. Now she is 28 and looks quite worn-out. Her teeth are bad and she seems exhausted. The children’s father is a day labourer and never brought home a lot of money. Usually he was drunk and beat her. He disappeared two years ago.

That’s not a bad thing, she would otherwise have eight children by now. Cristina fears the day he returns to the village. Beatings, fleeing the house with the children in the night – that must never happen again! Cristina hasn’t given up; she aims at self-sufficiency and has been promised a job as a cleaner. She can now go to work because her children are being looked

after in the social centre, from the playgroup in the nursery all the way through to homework, sports and music.

Cristina is one of the many mothers who have to support their children single-handed. Social welfare benefits don't go far. To have to depend on a violent man adds to the distress. We want to provide some assistance.

This summer, we started building houses for families in Nou. The mayor allocated a suitable building site. Six families will find shelter there before this Christmas, and we will continue the project next Spring. The fathers have formed small work gangs and carry out the building themselves. They cannot afford building materials, so we deliver whatever they need to the work sites.

The road Cristina has travelled is hard and thorny. She fights for her children – but soon her children will fight for her. Claudiu is already helping by looking after his siblings. Now and in real life, he will score many goals: that is what I firmly believe.

Dear friends, who has carried you through the difficult times? Thank you for travelling the thorny road with us, until the roses break into flower.

A happy Christmas from

Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ



Cristina and her family: From hovel to house

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