

Marpod, Advent 2021

*Dear friends,*

A young woman hastens along the street closely followed by a flock of seven children. This road leads to their school and they are in a hurry. The children will have to get used to rising early. At the school gate, Gianina hugs each of the children and then returns to the „Casa Ilie“. This home for homeless children opened on the first of September. The youth welfare office sends them to us; four childcare workers look after their charges. Soon twelve children will find a new family and the house will be full.

Who is Gianina? She grew up in a hut in Nou with her mother and two brothers and her stepfather Sonel. His family suffered a cruel fate: his father was knifed in a fight with a drunkard. Sonel is hardworking and ambitious, but his brother is of a different sort. He attempted to molest Gianina several times and Sonel could only solve the resulting conflicts by leaving their home with his wife and children. They moved into a stable up in the hills where his small herd of sheep and goats are pastured, and built a rude shelter of boards smeared with clay, the way herdsmen live out there. Unable to attend school, the children had to help herd the animals, milk them and make cheese. The winter was tough. Then their mother descended to the village and asked the Social Centre for help. Our manager Antoaneta found a solution: the children could eat in the canteen and attend study groups in the afternoon. Last winter, the whole family was able to move into one of the eleven houses we have built in Nou. A real home at last.

Gianina – ambitious – caught up with her subjects in school in addition to being the prettiest dancer in the dance group. But what would her future be? Antoaneta encouraged her to continue on to secondary school. Gianina was afraid that she wouldn't pass the test, and the teachers waved the idea aside: she was not able to communicate properly, they said; she smelled of the stable. But Gianina passed the test and finally graduated successfully, her main subject pedagogy.

Now this young woman, studying and caring for children at the same time, radiates joy. Her own life is the best role model which she can pass on to her flock. Gianina is a beacon of hope for us all.

“What will become of this child?” everyone asked when they heard of John the Baptist’s birth. His elderly parents Elizabeth and Zacharias were consumed by worry, the same as Mary and Joseph who were awaiting the birth of their child in a stable. And we fear for our children who come from surroundings of inconceivable neglect. But God writes straight even on crooked lines.

With you, dear friends, with all parents and grandparents, we share the Holy Family’s fear for the child.

Thankful for this bond between us, the ELIJAH community wishes you a Christmas full of profound hope!

Your

*Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*

