

Ziegental, Easter 2015

*Dear friends,*

someone is hammering on the door of our „House of the Raven“ in Ziegental. Who can still be at large, so late in the evening, and the village unlit? Perhaps an emergency? I have hardly unlocked the door when Codruza pushes her way into the house. A hard-working mother of seven children, usually quiet and reticent - today she is quite wrought up. Her eldest daughter Roxana has always been of great assistance at home, cooking, doing the laundry, looking after the children. Now she's away all the time, she's always at our place. Codruza wants money. If Roxana is working for us, then let us support her family in return. We are stunned. Roxana is living and training with us - isn't the family indebted to us for her education? The girl is sixteen but never completed school. Her parents kept her at home - she wouldn't have had a chance to learn a trade anyway. There are no jobs in Ziegental. She can't get to the town 30 kilometers away, there are neither bus nor train connections. Roxana would soon be given to a man and bear children, and be just as unable to cope as her mother. The same fate lies in wait for her seven younger siblings.

Ever since we opened the social centre Habakuk in Ziegental, Roxana had been coming over every day, helping to bathe the children and to do the laundry, eager and willing. She was the first we accepted into the Elijah girls' communal residence, in order to offer her a well-ordered life and to relieve the pressure on the family. For the last two weeks she has been training at the weaving loom. Just the other day she proudly spread her first creation for me to admire, a colourful carpet made of left-over rags. What a shame if she should be unable to continue her training! So I yield to her mother's demands and give her bread, oil and flour.

A few days later, Roxana's father comes over and laments that it is raining through their roof, everything is flooded. An old lorry tarpaulin is spread over the broken roof tiles, the beams are rotten. Together with the father, our workmen fix the house up: the roof, the windows and the door are made weather-proof. The family is overjoyed, and Roxana can stay with us. Soon she will be producing beautiful sheep's-wool carpets.

Through Roxana, I have realized a key fact: whenever we want to help a child, we must consider the repercussions on its family. In this case, the repairs to the house can be seen as recompense for the child's being allowed to study.

Up to now, we have created training positions for twelve women in Ziegental. They assist us in the pottery shop, the bakery and in the gardens. To be able to work, the young people need a place to live. For a fourteen-year-old in this village, her own bed and a practical education are an enormous luxury. Roxana and the first girls who live in a community with Aileen, a volunteer from Germany, are a great joy to us. Every day I see how they blossom as their hunger for learning is satisfied. Some day, they will determine their lives for themselves and support their families. This spring we plan to extend our house so that we can accept more girls. And we are dreaming of a communal residence for boys too, who will start training in our carpentry shop under the leadership of Salesian brother Bernhard. Ten candidates are already waiting.

All the young people around me are a symbol of Easter. They are on their way to joining a community. The hope that is spreading around them will reach you too, dear friends. Please continue to support us. The children's efforts are a thank-you for your help. And we pray for you.

To you and to all those entrusted to your care, a joyful Easter!

*Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*

