

Hosman, autumn 2020

Dear friends,

What would you like to become? The youngsters whom I asked this question are dreaming of a successful future: educator, singer, policeman, doctor. Then it was eight-year-old Stefania's turn. "Princess", she exclaimed, beaming, and was taken aback when everyone burst out laughing. I had to hug her. She is our ELIJAH community's youngest and newest member. Although she has loving parents and six siblings, she isn't homesick. In our house Stefania relishes this new world in which she is discovering so many new things. She attends the Social Centre daily and loves learning her first letters, so that she can start school in autumn.

Stefania was brought to us by Ovidiu, one of our interns. When the lockdown was imposed in March due to the corona pandemic, many families quickly fell into severe distress. Jobs for day labourers vanished; they had no supplies in their huts and nothing to eat. Our staff brought food packets to 150 families with all the essentials, including soap, clothing and handmade masks. I visited Stefania's family with Ovidiu in Marpod, one of the neighbouring villages.

Florin, the father of the family, has built their one-room hut on the outskirts of the village. Laboriously he collected building materials: left-overs, scraps, old pieces of canvas. He often lugs a small cart around the region calling out "Fiar vechi luaaam!" – "I take old metal!" At the collection point he will get a few lei for it. Sometimes there are a few pieces of tinfoil with which he can repair the roof. All the same, when it rains the house is flooded. The inside walls are painted a gaudy red. Parents and children, nine persons, sleep on two old couches. There is not much else: a broom, a pile of clothing. The washing is hanging on two lines outside. But the children are well-kept and clean, despite their poverty. Mama takes loving care of them – but worries about the future. The conditions are too cramped as it is, and now she is expecting twins. She asks how Stefania is doing, thankful that one child at least can go to school.

Florin wants to talk with me. For this important conversation he dons his spectacles. I express my surprise at how large they are. He laughs. We will have to build a house here with our outfit. With that promise we leave again, the parents calling thanks and blessings after us, and regards to Stefania.

At home in the evening, we celebrate Mass. Stefania is sitting next to me. When I relate our visit to her family in Marpod she hugs me in delight. We will do our very best to construct a new house with solid walls for her family before winter comes, so that they all stay healthy and the new-born twins will be welcomed into a warm home.

Besides the social centres, the music school and apprenticeship workshops, our primary duty is to protect the families. We have to start with the houses, for otherwise the children cannot attend school. This spring we initiated the program "Casa de piatra". For that we need the mayor's backing, as only he can provide the building area. At present we are building thirteen houses for poor families. There is a long waiting list. As a precondition, the fathers must go to work and the children must attend school.

"Casa de piatra", a house of stone. That is what one wishes a bridal pair in Romania. It means family solidarity and a solid dwelling.

Everything starts with Stefania, whom we have taken into our community. She is receiving schooling; she will pull her siblings along. Maybe one day she will become a princess. For us, she already is one.

Dear friends, please help us create a "Casa de piatra" for our families!
With thankful greetings,

Fr. George Grozavici SJ

OUR PROGRAMME „CASA DE PIATRA” - HOUSES FOR FAMILIES

