

Marpod, Advent 2025

Dear friends,

As I entered our women's shelter, I caught just a glimpse of a long colourful skirt disappearing around the corner. Our house manager told me that Rita was afraid: afraid of all men. She had been married off as a young girl, as was customary in her clan. No talk of love; it was all about money. But her parents were unable to pay the dowry, so the pair separated, and she had to return home. Soon she was married off again. She bore children, but her husband was often drunk, was prone to gambling and beat her. Rita wanted a divorce – but for that she would have needed the permission of the Stabor, the Roma court. Hopeless: her father and brothers wanted to prevent "the shame". Threats, shouting, scandal ... the police brought Rita to us to protect her from her family. We found her a job – she went to the factory without her colourful Roma skirt which was not permitted there. But her husband's clan and her brothers pursued her and brought her back into their power. She fled again, wandered all over the country with her two children and finally ended up in Vienna. From there, she called us and asked if we could take her in again. Thus, Rita arrived here some days ago. I can well understand that she is afraid of every man.

A mother with children, kicked out into the street. The father has a new woman. Or he drinks and is violent. From the villages outcast mothers come to us. Casa Nora in Sibiu gives them security and time to find a new path. We provide six small apartments with bedroom, kitchen, and bath. Above all, patient employees who listen. The children learn to play. The best part is that female students live in the same house and are there for the community as big sisters. They know ways of healing; they themselves have come from difficult circumstances and have managed to climb the ladder – university studies or a profession.

Our newest ELIJAH work is Casa Nora, in partnership with our student house "Casa Francisc". Bogdan functions as the father of this multi-faceted family of children, damaged mothers, and strong students. We named the house after a friend who has been with us for over thirty years. Nora created the first book about the children at the Bucharest railway station: "No one cries for me here". And most recently, the book about Moise, the eternal street child, in which he drew and described his fate, his crashes and his ascents. Nora is the godmother of our tightrope walk with mothers and children.

The **women's shelter „Casa Nora“** is our Christmas story. Here lives the Holy Family, in which young people help, mothers find safety and children can heal.

Dear friends of the ELIJAH community! You go with us – with the fleeing family. At the head go the mothers, accompanied by female students who themselves have been rescued. And somewhere are the fathers, too: they need mercy and must learn kindness. For them, Saint Joseph could be a good helper. He accepted Mary and Jesus and protected them when they had to flee.

Thank you, dear friends: you protect all our large family.

Blessed Christmas!

P. Georg Sporschill SJ