

## And be ye thankful!

(Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians 3,15)

*The Ark Village Bulletin*

*n. 1 / 2000*

*Dear all,*

this is the first issue in a new series of newsletters forming the continuation of the preceding ones, although it will differ slightly in terms of content. The reason for this will become clear on reading this first issue.

In the first place, although two months still remain before my leaving Italy, I wanted to thank all those I have been able to meet during my visit. To thank them for the welcome, friendship and hospitality that have always been shown, and for the solidarity and readiness with which each individual has, each in his own way, responded to the demands made. It is no coincidence that the title of the new series of newsletters will remain the same: "And be ye thankful!" Because only thanks for something that has happened to each of us can provide the appropriate reason and origin for a serious involvement in a work that is and will become increasingly demanding for all. In the contrary case, only a sense of compassion (for orphans, for the elderly or for anyone else), a sense of guilt for those who have less than me (like when we say to our children: "just think of all those children who haven't even a piece of bread!"), but realistically these are senses that in the best of cases last the brief space of an emotion. This is the mission, whether one be in the distant lands of Kazakhstan, or live in the busy cities of Lombardy or the Veneto or in the leafy region of Umbria: to experience joy for having met the Meaning of life, to desire that all have the same experience and thus spend one's time, energy, heart and – why not? – money for this to happen.

Now we come to the reason for this new series of newsletters. As I mentioned in some meetings in Italy, the matter of the children's home has arrived at a turning point. The children are growing and are children no more, and the story has led us to wonder whether we should stop here, or whether the family should grow. After some reflection, and talking to friends who have accompanied us in this experience and to those responsible for the Church locally, we have arrived at the conclusion that we might consider risking the next step, namely that the home become a little village, welcoming other children and beginning to change its outward appearance little by little. As far as I am concerned, this means a total commitment of energy, heart and time to be dedicated to this task, and so take the necessary steps to leave other responsibilities, those of the parish of Almaty above all. We are now looking for a replacement who can take over from me as quickly as possible.

The Talgar centre is now a reality no longer merely a dream. Over the period of a month, I have visited it several times with some friends, together with the Apostolic Nuncio of Almaty and with the new Apostolic Administrator, so that, having seen it with their own eyes, they might give me their opinion and help me take the final decision. They were all enthusiastic about the place and each saw the possibility of future development.

The property has been purchased and we are now in the phase of registering all the documents with the land registry and various state bodies. The next step will be to sign the new contracts for the water, telephone and drains. But in the meantime, which means today, at 10 am on 18th April, the refurbishment work is beginning on one of the buildings and completion of the perimeter wall. A construction company in Almaty has already been contacted, which seems to offer guarantees of limited cost, acceptable quality and respect of delivery times.

This first building will serve to receive children from an orphanage for the disabled at Almaty, who will be our guests for three months, from 1st June to the end of August. We expect groups of 10-15 children, for a total number of 100-120 children. During this summer period, we hope to be able to start work on the total reconstruction of one of the buildings that should accommodate the children in our present home. This work will certainly be more demanding and costly, and it is still hard to foresee whether we shall be in time to open this first home before the onset of winter.

We spent last weekend with the children at Talgar, starting to clean and tidy the grounds around the first of the buildings. The children were very excited, and the general image seemed like that of a filmset, with a group of pioneers or survivors finding a long-abandoned house and beginning to repair it in order to live within its walls. The wonderful thing is that the news seems already to be spreading amongst the neighbours, who are interested and have been coming to see who are these strange people who seemed to have fallen from the sky in their midst. One man began to speak of the old days, when the camp used to receive hundreds of children, and how useful it had been to the local community. And now...

I am convinced that, given its position in a fairly young district with lots of children, that the centre will with time become a point of reference and welcome for all. Wait and see!

This is the situation at the moment, and we hope that the next newsletter will give further information about the progress of the work and of the centre's activities. I ask you to remember us as never before, so that from the very start this place may be what the good Lord wishes it to be. I remember you all with affection and gratitude, and wish you all a good holy Easter.

*your*  
*f. Guido*