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MISSION MOLDOVA

**PRESENTATION OF EUROPEAN CHILDREN'S
TRIBUTE TO POPE FRANCIS**

Friday 14 March 2014 at 1800

Trieste's Impact Hub
Via di Cavana 14 - Trieste

Interview

Mgr Cesare Lodeserto President of the 'Regina Pacis' Foundation

Mgr Cesare Lodeserto, an Italian Fidei Donum priest who has been in Moldova for a number of years, explains the reason behind the meeting.

Why this meeting?

We decided to present the book about a year after the election of Pope Francis, which from an ecclesial point of view has been a year of great emotions, thanks also due to the choices made by a Pope who has symbolically brought back believers and non-believers to the heart of the Church. So, to reflect on the gestures of Pope Francis and above all his dialogue with the world's little children excites us, encourages us and at the same time helps us to understand that still today, despite the current crises, the Church's dialogue with the world is open and has a future.

Why in Trieste?

Trieste is a city on the borders of Italy, and for years has been a transit city for migrants, especially Moldovans, who have found job opportunities in Italy. It must be remembered that in Italy there are just under 200,000 Moldovan émigrés. Furthermore, last September saw the start in Trieste of the 'Mission Moldova' programme, shared between the Diocese of Trieste and the Moldovan Catholic Church to provide a greater commitment to the unexpected increasing numbers of people from the East. In fact, the day after the book launch, there is a Conference entitled 'A European and Christian Moldova', aimed at reflecting on the situation in this Eastern country and its political evolution.

Since last September, how has Vasile's life changed?

Not at all! In fact, the day after he came back from Rome he went to school, like all children. Vasile understood the importance of the meeting and has also been able to transmit that same value to his friends. At the same time, as teachers, we have tried to hand on to him a correct sense of responsibility. But, he has taken a wonderful step: he is now an altar server in the Catholic Church, while remaining a little Orthodox boy.

What did Vasile's meeting with the Pope mean for him, for the Catholic community in Moldova, and for the Republic of Moldova?

Seeing again the pictures of this meeting I think about Jesus' meetings with people. Meetings rich in grace, enthusiasm, and which always produced **the beauty of the miracle**. We are not the masters of history, but Divine Providence is, writing the pages of an ever-new Gospel. That is why I say that meeting is a Gospel page. Right from the start of his pontificate Pope Francis has given clear messages about an evolution of the Church and immediately we asked him if we could name our soup kitchen for the poor people of Chişinău after him. **He said yes**, so with a hint of pride in a country where Catholics are a clear minority, we put up a massive picture of the Pope with the sign 'Pope Francis Soup Kitchen'. The Moldovan people have begun to get to know this figure, who came to the fore again on the occasion of the meeting with the little Moldovan Vasile. For local people all this means that we are a living Church, present, in love with this stupendous land of the East able to exalt the smallest [ones], who too often are humiliated and abandoned.



What are the challenges for the Catholic Church?

The challenge of the streets ... I invented the '**street parish**', perhaps a pastoral mess, but still effective in a country where the streets are full of joy and sorrow, success and hope. So to live on the street, for a priest like me, is a joy and increases the passion for the encounter with the other person, whom you must love whoever it may be, whatever they may do, to grow, because the other person is a gift Jesus has left for you. We the priests of this strange East are on the same path and in his footsteps. Challenges are presented by the poor, life, the family, children. The challenge is this "world's south" located in the East!

The Catholic Church in Moldova: on the path of little children!

The commitment of the Catholic Church in Moldova has also had very clear and well-defined objectives, despite the paucity of the number of faithful. **Care for the smallest children**, within a Moldovan society where, along with the elderly, these represent the weakest and most needy social category, has been the primary responsibility. Concrete and particularly excellent work has been carried out: infant schools both in the capital Chişinău and in the parishes on the outskirts; hospitality in family homes for street children; orphanages; professional formation; social and healthcare assistance; respite holidays, etc. These are stable and concrete projects.

The pastoral work desired by Mgr Anton Cosa, Bishop of Chişinău, has penetrated into **the places of suffering** and the hearts of the little ones who are suffering. Projects have been launched providing a stable presence within the Moldovan state's only juvenile detention centre, with professional formation, school education and collaboration on programmes implemented by other European church bodies; and above all facilitating family contact between female detainees and their children, with external educational and recreational activities.

Since Moldova is a country of emigration – in fact 25% of the population is resident abroad – **the phenomenon of "competing minorities"** within mixed families is on the increase. In these cases, too, which are not rare, the Catholic Church has had to provide family, and especially psychological, mediation services.

Being alongside the smallest children requires passion and competence, as well as the need to be able to give answers to the **Gospel of the last**. The Catholic Church in Moldova is called to respond to the cry of the innocent, taking on its own responsibilities, and often making up for the shortages of the State.

My name is Vasile ...

The story of the little Moldovan boy who met the Pope

For a boy from the East, who had never been able to pronounce one of the most important words in the life of humanity, such as the terms *mummy* and *daddy*, everything was becoming difficult, so one day little Vasile wrote: "Dear Pope Francis ...".

In **Vasile's letter to the Pope** there are two statements: "They stole my mummy... and I want to say I've got a father, too". And this is the story of little Vasile, no different from that of so many children who live in the land of Moldova and to whom history has denied a normal family life.

One evening a Moldovan TV station broadcast

the story of Vasile and Maria, his sister,

giving voice to the mother lamenting the impossibility of looking after the two children because of poverty. The

mother's desperate cry was heard by a Catholic missionary in Moldova, who the

next morning took charge of the two small children, welcoming them into a family home

for street children in the capital Chişinău. Sadly,

shortly afterwards the mother of the two Moldovan children was **tragically killed**, and the father had died some time previously, destroyed by alcoholism.



The Regina Pacis family home has become permanently a family for the two little children, and so they have been able to begin to lead **normal lives** at school and in the various activities proposed in the welcoming family home.

One day Vasile wanted to write to Pope Francis, a distant and also incomprehensible figure to him, as he himself wrote in the letter, but he also understood that he could be important in his life, perhaps encouraged by what he heard from the missionary.

The letter to Pope Francis, like the many letters from European children, **found a space in the Pope's heart**, up until the meeting last 4 September. A stupendous meeting, between two different ways of being great in this world, which celebrated a significant friendship which found its most beautiful moment in Vasile's gesture when **he placed around the Pope's neck** a little wooden cross he himself had made.

After the meeting with the Pope, Vasile returned to Moldova, full of emotion, but also trying to understand what being the **Ambassador of children on the margins of Europe** might mean for him. The questions allow the dawn of hope to grow and be seen in the life of this small boy, too.

No one can give back to Vasile his mother and father, whom history and human evil have stolen from him; however he knows someone loves him, helps him to grow and have dignity and respect. That is how it should be for so many little children from the East, because in embracing him Pope Francis embraced them all.

Program

Friday 14 and Saturday 15 March

Trieste's Impact Hub, Via di Cavana, 14 – Trieste

Friday 14 March 2014

1800

Moderation: Father Mario de Stefano

Greeting of H.Exc. Mgr Anton Cosa, *Bishop of Chişinău*

Greeting of Rev. Michel Remery, *Vice Secretary General of the Council of European Bishop's Conferences (CCEE)*

Showing of a video realized by the Association "Enzo B." of Turin in cooperation with the Regina Pacis Foundation in Moldova

Address of H.Exc. Mgr Gianpaolo Crepaldi, *Archbishop of Trieste*

Pope Francis and the children of the world

Saturday 15 March 2014

0900

Greeting of H.Exc. Mgr Gianpaolo Crepaldi, *Archbishop of Trieste*

0915

ALIVE EXPERIENCE IN MOLDOVA

Moderation: Rev. Mario de Stefano

The moldovan migration phenomenon

Antonio Polosa, *Chief of the OIM delegation in Moldova*

The daily contact with the poor

Ilie Zabica, *Regina Pacis Foundation in Moldova*

For the care of the smallest

Vasile Tarita, *Enzo B. association in Moldova*

"I tell you what I have seen"

Luca Tedeschi, *Mission Moldova Association*

1030

Coffee break

1045

DEBATE ON “A EUROPEAN AND CHRISTIAN MOLDOVA”

Moderation: Alfonso Luzzi

Moldova and the European Integration Process

Victor Lutenco, *Chief of the Office for the relation with the diaspora to the Moldovian Government*

The Christian roots in the Integration process

Luca Volontè, *General Director of Novae Terrae Foundation, Milan-Geneva, Chain Human Dignity Institute, Rome*

As Christians we start from the lastest

Carlo Costalli, *President of the Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori*

1300

Break

1530

THE COMMITMENT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FOR THE MOLDOVANS

Moderation: Rev. Mario de Stefano

The moldovan presence in Italy

Mgr Giancarlo Perego, *President of the Migrantes Foundation*

A Church project for the care of a nation

H.Exc. Mgr Anton Cosa, *Bishop of Chisinau*

1700

Closing acts

