

THE LAITY AND MINISTRY

The experience of Maurizio Trabuio in the wake of the Comboni charism

At the end of the 80s of the last century a group of young people who gravitated around the Comboni community in Padua (they called themselves GIM, i.e. Youth Missionary Commitment) met a few individuals of good will from different educational backgrounds and a worker from Caritas Diocesana: they got together to start a series of activities to promote the reception of migrants. In fact, as these increased in number in the territory, ever fewer of them were able to find forms of support and institutional integration. The association Unica Terra was set up, which was the first in the Province of Padua to open a reception shelter, creating the necessary synergies between the Elizabethan Sisters - who made an old farmhouse in Bosco di Rubano available free of charge - the volunteers, the municipal administration and the parishes of Rubano. In literature years later such a shelter would be called co-housing for young foreign workers: 17 beds with a low turnover due to the serious housing emergency, which, although in a different form, still continues to give answers to people in distress¹.

Two years later, even Caritas Diocesana decided to engage in a testimonial activity and with an investment ten times as much as that of the small association Unica Terra, restructured a portion of the oratory of the Parish of Mandria in Padua and built a reception shelter for 10 people, entrusting its management to the Suore Operaie of Brescia. The centre, called Centro Mondo Amico, thus became the institutional response of the Church of Padua. Like all testimony works, while welcoming, it is also the point of reference for good practices, organizational methods, spirit and style of involvement of guests and volunteers.

After the emergency evolved, about ten years later, Caritas Diocesana entrusted the Comboni sisters with the management of the Centro Mondo Amico, making it a welcoming structure for women and children². Fifteen years later, and we are now in 2018, Caritas Diocesana decides that the testimonial work is no longer sustainable and returns the property to the Parish.

The parish priest, who is also in charge of the neighbouring parish and the spiritual assistant of the largest retirement home for the elderly in the Veneto region, and the parish community are used to thinking that others take care of that service and space, so they suddenly find themselves having to decide what to do. Dropping the experience? Let the local voluntary work that over the years had somehow become involved in the proximity of the people welcomed disperse? Letting out the freed space on the market? Transform it into further space to be dedicated to catechesis and pastoral work when it is already impossible to fill those already available? To watch without doing anything the queue of people who over the last 25 years had learned a way to ask for help?

In the meantime, in order to respond to the growing complexity of reality and the epochal changes that have occurred with globalization, I had started other experiences to promote the right to housing: the Cooperativa Nuovo Villaggio and the Fondazione La Casa Onlus³, which build and manage

real estate assets for access to housing for the groups that are excluded from it. And then, taking the path of social entrepreneurship, I also started the cooperative Città Solare , whose mission is to create spaces and activities to provide housing and work opportunities for fragile people. It is a small group of social enterprises always looking for a balance between sustainability, innovation and quality of services. For the employment of fragile people, it operates in the collection and disposal of urban waste; it has a laboratory where it manufactures industrial work on behalf of third parties, and it manages accommodation facilities that are also an opportunity for people experiencing a shelter crisis⁴. As for situations of housing deprivation, it manages housing and provides housing services in different areas of the region⁵.

Back to the present, the parish priest presented to Città Solare the questions that the Christian community posed . The steering group immediately evaluates that the management of the service in those spaces and with that destination will never be sustainable, indeed the risk of significant losses is almost certain, so it brings up an alternative proposal to the parish: to experiment together a "hybrid" solution combining qualified operators employed by the cooperative and parish volunteers. Together they can continue to provide shelter for women, children and men in difficulty; but in order to be accessible to most people it is necessary to integrate professional expertise , which is expensive, and with voluntary and free availability.

For personal and community reflection:

- What strikes me about this experience of lay ministry? Why?
- What does this experience evoke in me? For what reason?
- What does it say to us as a community?

NOTES

¹ http://www.rubano.it/sites/default/files/eventi/pieghevole_rubano.pdf

² <http://www.caritas.diocesipadova.it/opere-diocesane/senza-dimora/>;
http://www.webdiocesi.chiesacattolica.it/cci_new/s2magazine/index1.jsp?idPagina=15693;
<http://www.comboniane.org/centro-mondo-amico.html>

³ https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=citt%C3%A0%20solare&epa=SEARCH_BOX;
https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=coop.%20nuovo%20villaggio&epa=SEARCH_BOX;
https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=fondazione%20la%20casa%20onlus&epa=SEARCH_BOX

⁴ <https://www.casaacolori.org/it/>

⁵ <https://quipadova.com/>; <http://www.fondazione lacasa.org/>