They dislodged Jesus (Bring Jesus back to Christmas)

Why do we carry out this project?

The initial idea came from a reflection written by Chiara Lubich (1920 - 2008), founder of the Focolare Movement:

“Christmas is approaching and the streets of the city are covered with lights. An endless row of shops, an endless wealth, but exorbitant. To the left of our car, there is a series of windows that stand out. Beyond the glass it snows gracefully: optical illusion. Then boys and girls on sleds pulled by reindeer and Walt Disney animals. And also sledges and Santa Claus and fawns, piglets, hares, puppet frogs and red dwarfs. Everything moves gracefully. ... It aims on Christmas for the best earnings of the year. But it doesn’t think of Jesus. “He came among his own and they did not receive him ...” “There was no place for him at the inn "... not even at Christmas ..."

Since 1997, throughout the world, thousands of Gen 4 - children of the Focolare Movement – answered to Chiara's invitation to bring Jesus back to the center of Christmas. Together with parents, friends and other members of the Movement, in city squares, in their local institutions, in schools, in markets and in the streets, they offer Jesus to little kids: plaster statuettes on cribs of all kinds elaborated by themselves, together with the writing of Chiara Lubich entitled "They have dislodged Jesus". (Bring Jesus back to Christmas)?

This dimension of acceptance of the child Jesus has stimulated in the Gen 4, as in the persons who receive it, the desire to give. In fact there are many people who, when they receive the baby Jesus, spontaneously donate an offer to support this initiative.

This is why the Gen 4 immediately thought of their peers, that is, those children who, in every part of the world, like baby Jesus lack the necessary. This is why they want to give them what they have collected. Each year, therefore, they identify specific activities / projects to which these funds will be allocated.

“We give the money to poor children, those less fortunate than us, so that they can buy clothes, shoes ... buy food and can go to school," says a girl who participated in this action.

What need do we want to answer?

- Having people lost the true meaning of Christmas, we want to remind everyone, in the days preceding it, that the true celebration is the "birthday" of Jesus: it is Jesus who is born for us and asks nothing more than a place in our hearts, in our homes ...

“Why do you bring Baby Jesus to the streets?,” A girl was asked. "Because there are people who don’t not know Baby Jesus and so we take him to the streets to let him be known.”-
- It is an invitation to turn our gaze to essential things. During the Christmas season, in fact, the beautiful custom of exchanging gifts (linked to the memory of the gift of Jesus given to us by the Father) often turns into a rush to purchase, into mere consumerism.1

1(“Consumerism is a collective mental illness. Modern man seems to be afflicted by a psychosis that drives him to transform the natural human use of resources into an extremely toxic and destructive process” (Consumed: Inside the Belly of the Beast, documentary) "Basing your happiness on having it is absurd ...", "today you suffer for" the poison "of an empty society that proposes" the illusion "of" consumerism ", " the true richness "is the love of God from sharing with the brothers ", " the encounter with Jesus alive, fills the heart with joy ", " of real life, of a profound good ", " we face the daily vanity, the poison of the void that creeps into our societies based on profit and having, which delude people with consumerism ".)

- An awareness that Jesus wants to be welcomed in every person, especially in children, especially in those who live in poverty, or in victims of violence of all kinds, who are denied basic human rights. The presence of the Focolare Movement in many countries of the world makes it possible to know these situations directly and to intervene concretely on the spot.

**Objectives**

- Reinforce in children the values of which Christmas is a bearer: the gift of self, gratitude, disinterested love, generosity. Indirectly, reinforce these values even in adults and families.

- Promote manual, creative, imaginative, cooperative, programming, expression skills through the creation of statuettes, the design and implementation of activities usually carried out in public places.

- Develop an active citizenship in children and promote the values of solidarity, fraternity and justice, through fundraising to provide concrete answers to the needs of those children who, in other areas of the world or their territory, do not have the possibility to meet their primary needs (food, health, education, etc ...)

“Besides teaching the child to move with more fluidity among the others, the relationships between peers correspond to a fundamental need to develop their own social and individual identity”; “Emotions and affects are of fundamental importance in every aspect of human behavior. Emotions are those behaviors put in place in front of people or situations that arouse feelings in us; when we speak of affective development we refer to the modes of relationship that we establish with the people who are close to us ”; “... with friends, the child cooperates and competes, manages to solve problems, confronts himself, seeking confirmation of his personal value.” (Centro Orientazione Foundation, Alessandria)

**Beneficiaries**

- Children aged 3 to 9 involved in the preparation and implementation of the initiative, of which they are the main protagonists.

- The local community through the institutions that will be brought to the attention of the initiative and all the people who pass through the streets, squares, parks, shopping centers, etc. where activities are carried out.

- The families of children, teachers, operators, groups also involved in the preparation phase.

"Entering a supermarket and being greeted by such smiling children who offer you Baby Jesus is overwhelming", testified a man from Florence. "We think we can find everything in a supermarket, but I never thought I could go home bringing Jesus with me!", he said.
- Children and groups who will benefit from the funds being raised.

**Methodology**

**How do we plan to carry out the project, how will it develop, how it is structured, times and methods, produced material?**

- Ensure that in all cities and localities the Gen 4 have the necessary material to build the baby Jesus statues, leaving every local community to find the most suitable ways to carry out this initiative on the spot. This entails having to buy the molds, the chalk, the painting, the baskets, the straw, the paper to wrap them, the brushes; print the sheets with the writing of Chiara Lubich: "They have dislodged Jesus" (or Bring Jesus back to Christmas); or the necessary material for the construction of the cribs, according to the possibilities and creativity of the place.

- Identify suitable public places where children can go to offer baby Jesus or cribs: squares, markets, streets, shopping centers, schools, so you can set up a stand where you can place the baskets with baby Jesus, with posters that illustrate their activities, the significance of this action and to whom the funds raised will be allocated.

- Identify suitable people who can accompany the children in the place where their activities will be carried out, in order to protect them adequately.

- In some cities, children also prepare Christmas songs or scenes about the story of Jesus that they themselves act out, where they offer the statuettes. Or they organize Christmas parties for families or for nursing homes ... In these cases, they should get at least one box and a microphone (like karaoke), set design, costumes, transportation, invitations, the hall or a suitable place for the show.

- There are many experiences that children tell to say what this activity inspires in them, just as many are those of those who receive baby Jesus from these little smiling people who, with so much love, would like to find a home for Jesus at least during Christmas. It would therefore be important to circulate these experiences throughout the world, to make this action known and to involve a growing number of children, but also of friends, relatives and adults, who surround them, in the family, in schools, in parishes.

**What are the challenges we meet?**

- Indifference

- Permits to carry out this activity in public places

- To be able to have in all countries the material to make the baby Jesus figurines (purchase-dispatch); in the poorer countries this can be a real difficulty. It is important, however, not to restrain the child in the ability to grasp the needs of the neediest and to develop the dimension of the gift in itself. Even in Africa, the statues are built and the children send their proceeds to Syria, just as the ones in Jerusalem do it for the children of Africa.

- Spread this activity so as to involve as many children as possible, but also teachers, parents, and all those who can contribute to help them in their beautiful and important initiative.