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## Coronavirus Covid-19: USA unprepared for the pandemic. The States' uncoordinated action

(from New York) Mary Anne lives in an elderly care centre in Pennsylvania. Since the governor raised the alert level and shut down all schools, no guest can leave campus except for medical checkups, while whoever enters the main building must have their temperature checked. Mary Anne is 70 years old and she suffers from asthma, but seeing that the relatives of in-patients are not allowed inside to change their clothing, she decided to volunteer to do the laundry and help out the orderlies.

"Approximately 275 elderly people live in our residential community. They are amongst the most vulnerable and *some suffer from dementia, so they can't understand why they need to keep a safe distance and need reassurance*," said Mary Anne, who decided to offer her help, taking every precaution, remembering the early Christians and how they ministered to the sick. Farid is a deacon in the Orthodox Church in Brooklyn. In everyday life he works as a mechanic. When he learned that a doctor in New Jersey, a friend of his wife's, did not have enough supplies for staff and patients, he shipped them all the protective face masks he had in his car workshop. This is how US citizens are reacting to the Coronavirus national emergency announced by President Trump last Friday, after weeks of delays, ironic tweets, official speeches stating that Covid-19 was a public health problem that would be overcome in a few weeks. *The country's reaction to the pandemic, as declared by the World Health Organization has been sluggish, lacking effective government direction*, despite Vice-President Pence chairing a team of virologists and experts tasked with producing guidelines. Under the Federal Constitution of the United States, each Governor sets its own State regulations, thus the State of Washington, the first to register the death of patients in a nursing home, has taken drastic measures and its virologists started to prepare test kits. The test kits were supposed to be ready for use by February 28, but the lack of FDA certification slowed down the process. Delays also occurred in obtaining virus samples. In addition, 1.5 million test kits announced by the government turned out to be a flop: the university laboratories where they had been prepared had equipment that was impossible to obtain in many States and counties. *It's the limit of a state-based – i.e. not national - health system, whereby the lack of standardised procedures is now a major problem*. Trump, accused of downplaying the crisis, detailed all the efforts the administration is putting in place together with pharmaceutical companies and private research groups in Friday's press conference. These actions are intended to expedite test kits production and distribution. *The number of people tested in all the USA, inhabited by some 325 million people, stands at 15,000*. In the city of Brownsville, Texas, on the border with Mexico, only 3 people out of a population of 200,000 residents have been tested so far. In the meantime, the US President sought to restore the certainty of financial markets, in turmoil after the first declaration, then refuted, to block goods from Europe, securing \$50 billion in Federal funds to address the epidemic, while the Federal Reserve cut interest rates to almost zero. After lengthy and exhausting negotiations, the House of Representatives and the President adopted a package of benefits and remunerations for workers who will remain on sick leave, increased unemployment benefits, free anti-virus testing and additional funds for food aid and Medicaid, the federally funded medical care program for low-income families. *In the meantime, the governors, mayors, local administrators, corporate managers, rectors and principals have decided to close public spaces, offices, schools, universities and take drastic measures also with regard to public transport*. Disneyland, the Supreme Court, the Capitol, Museums, Dodgers Stadium, Broadway theaters have been shut down. Major League Baseball and the Boston Marathon have been suspended, and even Hollywood decided to block movie releases in theatres - without waiting for directions from the White House: far too unclear and undecided. **"The system is not really geared to what we need right now. The idea of anybody getting it easily the way people in other countries are doing it — we're not set up for that"**, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, openly contradicting the President also on the timing of

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the vaccine, "not a few months, but at least a year".

Maddalena Maltese