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## Caritas volunteers among the homeless on the streets of Las Vegas. Bishop Thomas: "Saints in our midst!"

The photograph of hundreds of homeless people sleeping on the pavement of Las Vegas's Cashman Center parking lot, and the chaos in the aid distribution chain affecting the U.S. at multiple levels, evidences the exacerbation of a social crisis that the Covid-19 has dramatically exposed. Until two days ago, dozens of people now lying on the pavement were hosted by the city's Caritas homeless shelter. Until one of them tested positive for the Coronavirus. The security measures enforced by the government to prevent the spread of the contagion led to the closing of the facility, thereby causing all those who had a safe haven to end up on the street. The city of Las Vegas tried to provide 8 000 square metres of padded carpeting for everyone, while 50 volunteer workers blanketed the makeshift parking lot camp with the soft material, but as the carpeting couldn't be sanitized, city officials told them to sleep on the pavement. *There are currently 177 people living in parking spaces from 6 pm to 8 am, while the famous casino resorts are shut down and hundreds of hotels are completely empty.* In response to strong criticism directed against the mayor on social media for a scandal extending across State borders, spokesman David Rigglesman said that they were unable to address the emergency, not least because of lack of appropriate social response plans with regard to the pandemic. "This has overwhelmed our resources," Rigglesman said, pointing out that the closure of casinos, restaurants and meeting places *has put not only the homeless on the streets but also thousands of workers, causing a severe social crisis in the entire area.* While the Cashman center's parking lot was used for the homeless, the concrete facility was turned into an emergency hospital for scores of infected people that cannot be admitted in local medical facilities due to overcrowding. Caritas is doing its best to ensure the reopening of the homeless shelter, but social distancing due to the pandemic will not allow the same number of homeless people to be accommodated, so another solution will have to be found.



Immagine non disponibile

[. is continuing to visit all relief facilities in the diocese, joining the dozens of volunteers distributing packaged meals to the homeless as well as to dozens of families affected by the economic crisis created by Covid-19. "I was deeply moved by the courage, compassion and creativity of our staff and volunteers in the front line since the outbreak of the pandemic," said the bishop, mindful of the hardships faced not only by the homeless but also by all the poor in his diocese. The Catholic charity is the largest provider of meals in the state of Nevada and thanks to the sponsorship of a local resort, in the last two weeks has been able to ensure enough food to a thousand people every day. Greeting the many homeless or wheelchair-bound people waiting in line, according to the required health regulations, the bishop said he was deeply touched by the gratitude expressed by each one, by the](#)

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*dignity and composure shown by everyone standing in line, waiting not only for food but also for a word of comfort. "The hidden heroes in our community - continued Monsignor Thomas - include all those who made it possible for the Meals on Wheels program to continue. Caritas leaders and volunteers have been nothing short of extraordinary in these difficult days. We have saints in our midst!"*

Maddalena Maltese