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## Coronavirus. CEI "Listening Network", a helpline service for families in need, is now available. Father Vianelli highlights the "teamwork"

National coordination and synergy: these are the watchwords of the "Listening Network", a newly launched project of the Italian Church that aims to "listen to and meet the needs of families in difficult situations as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, to help them and support them in this challenging recovery phase." Father **Marco Vianelli**, head of the National Office for Family Pastoral Care of the Italian Bishops' Conference, coordinator of the project that kicks off today, July 1, explained the initiative to SIR.

"It features teamwork.

The national helpline 06.81159111 (active from Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.) and, for people with disabilities, via the e-mail address [pastoraledisabili@chiesacattolica.it](mailto:pastoraledisabili@chiesacattolica.it) - he explained - will offer the assistance of 309 experts from 63 counselling centres linked to 3,600 counselling facilities of Caritas, which joins the project with its network." The initiative is promoted by the National Office led by Fr. Vianelli; the National Service for the Pastoral Care of People with Disabilities and by Caritas Italy, in collaboration with the Conference of Family Counselling Centres of Christian inspiration (CFC) and the Italian Union of premarital and marriage counselling Centres (UCIPEM).



Immagine non disponibile

"The initiative started to take shape during the last stages of the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, following an intuition expressed in particular by family counselling centres, many of which had set up a freephone help line during the lockdown", said the coordinator. "A valuable service, yet somewhat amateurish. By working together, the project was gradually developed with the involvement of the National Service for the Pastoral Care of People with Disabilities and of Caritas." "It's a comprehensive counselling service with national relevance, not for therapeutic support, which established a connection with the local community" said Fr. Vianelli. After hearing families' problems, either a solution is found therein, or they are redirected, according to the different needs, to the local counselling centres, to Caritas or to the Service for People with Disabilities.

These are intersecting networks: the aim is to create connections between these networks".

**What do families need the most?** "Relational issues emerged as the main problem in the counselling centres. This problem has been aggravated by confinement, but it showed that the family, despite the stressful situation, withstood it better than expected. However, many people feel the need to share that experience and redefine their educational/parental roles. Economic issues have also

emerged - the need for some financial support or information on the procedures for accessing government funds - along with major difficulties of families with people with disabilities who faced the greatest stress and hardship." **Simplification is the key word.** In addition to the nationwide hotline, every counselling centre in the network has its own dedicated helpline number. Vianelli's wish is that all CFC and UCIPEM counselling services adhere to the project: "thus

**a nation-wide common platform could be set up with a toll-free number.**

with qualified staff offering professional assistance at a national level so as to redirect people to the most appropriate and closest services in the area."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euANDtfP5Rw&feature=youtu.be> "I am grateful to Brother Marco for this initiative," stated Sister **Veronica Amata Donatello**, Director of the National Service for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Disabilities, recalling the family support service offered during the Coronavirus crisis. "Together with a number of priests and bishops, we are in touch with family associations and caregivers every week," she said. "We immediately embraced this initiative as soon as it took shape. The counselling services will involve the diocesan referents of the National Service and experts who will respond to requests from families, spouses and private individuals." "Persons with hearing impairment can send an e-mail to [pastoraledisabili@chiesacattolica.it](mailto:pastoraledisabili@chiesacattolica.it)," said Sister Veronica. "We will create some videos because we have also received this request." For the nun "the most beautiful gift is to listen, to accompany, to be close. They know there is a space where they will find people - sometimes also mothers, fathers or brothers and sisters of people with disabilities - who understand them and can walk with them. After the lockdown, most of them are still at home, the day care centres are re-opening intermittently, and families are still struggling."

**Creating territorial support is a way to for them to see a new dawn.**

"**Caritas Italy has made available its network of approximately 3,600 counselling centres, located throughout every diocese and already offering support to people in difficulty,**" said **Renato Marinaro**, responsible for the project together with Francesca Levroni. "The survey carried out in April in all dioceses, and the second one that has just ended and whose findings we expect to see in the first days of the coming week, brought to the fore situations of serious employment difficulties coupled by worsening financial problems - is the snapshot taken by Caritas -. Two-thirds of all dioceses reported family difficulties and serious challenges faced by children in keeping up with online learning due to a lack of digital tools. Approximately 60% reported health issues - need for testing swabs or home physiotherapists for elderly people requiring rehabilitation - to which public health services were struggling to respond. Many people turned to us for basic necessities: food parcels, meals, financial aid to pay rents and bills. These situations of fragility predated Covid but they were aggravated by the pandemic." We are presently training staff to help people entitled to government subsidies - added Marinaro - to explain complex procedures that include eligibility requirements and access details, so that those in need may avail themselves of this service." *On a more general level, the diocesan Caritas centres "will redirect persons to the most appropriate services or other relevant services at local level. Indeed, the fact of having established a fruitful cooperation with public bodies and other local realities is extremely important," he pointed out. "The networking effort is fundamental. Caritas and the Church cannot be expected to solve all the problems. We need to team up with everyone."*

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