
Italian-speaking Catholic Missions confront the pandemic: a small homeland for Italians abroad

We are facing a challenging period caused by the ongoing pandemic affecting the whole world. "It will not be an easy month, for any of us, and it's November, a sad month, the short amount of sunlight makes us predisposed to melancholia", writes the monthly magazine of the Italian Catholic Missions in Germany and Scandinavia, "Corriere d'Italia", commenting on the lockdown in Germany that will remain in place until the end of the month. Anti-coronavirus measures were announced on October 28th by Chancellor Merkel in agreement with the Minister-Presidents of the Länder and will apply until the end of November, in an effort to curb a rapid rise in coronavirus infections. Authorities' invitation is to act responsibly: we must make this collective responsibility our own. Italians living abroad follow with concern the situation in the countries where they live with a gaze at their country of origin, Italy. *Italian-speaking Catholic Missions represent a small homeland for Italians abroad. Especially in these times of pandemic, the Catholic Missions keep offering the possibility to cultivate and practice the faith in accordance with their origins and traditions.* "Our task as an Italian-speaking Community is to continue our pastoral care for (but not only) Italians, offering spiritual support and assistance and not leaving them alone in this time of difficulty", said Silvana Pisaturo, President of the Pastoral Council of the Italian-speaking Catholic Mission in the Canton of Lucerne, **Switzerland**. The coronavirus epidemic is affecting "not only our daily life, but also our way of life." The challenge is to find new ways and/or options to "rediscover the value of being and of forming part of a community in this time that exposed basic human needs: the need for security and protection, for belonging, for affection and identification, for success, for self-fulfillment. We lost control of our lives and we were not ready for this. This is especially evident in Switzerland, a rich country with great opportunities". *For those with family in Italy, no longer being allowed to travel as before, not being able to give a comforting hug to their loved ones and not knowing when they will have an opportunity to get together, increases the sadness.* The Catholic Mission in the Canton of Lucerne report "a strong need to be heard, to communicate, to process these feelings". The picture in **Hungary** is constantly evolving, said Fr. Sergio Tellan from the Italian Catholic Mission in Budapest. "The situation is far from positive. Until a few months ago, Hungary had been spared from contagion, people were allowed to circulate freely. The news from Italy was followed with apprehension. Several Italian families have been infected." The Italian community has resumed activities only in part. Only Mass celebration is allowed, while catechesis and formation activities continue online and contacts are kept via phone and new media. High rates of infection and overcrowded intensive care units in London have led the Government to impose a second lockdown in the city, which, according to Fr. Andrea Fulco, from the St. Peter's Italian Catholic Mission in **London**, is not perceived as restrictive as the previous one. Members of the Italian community are living "as if they were in Italy, and therefore tend to stay and home, with many working from home. Livestreamed Mass is a blessing for pastoral ministry: we reach not only to parishioners but to everyone. Electronic media have a considerable potential, although they are devoid of human relations and contact." The priest carries out catechetical activities for marriage preparation on a regular basis through online platforms. First Communion catechists have involved children and their parents in the educational task of teaching the doctrine to their children, followed online by the same catechists. In this way the Church "is never closed. Besides being open only for individual worship, it remains open on the various forms of streaming." *The uncertain situation and border closures amplify homesickness and problems linked to being far away from one's loved ones.* The primary goal of the Italian Catholic Mission in **Bern**, Switzerland, is to continue experiencing community life in different forms. "Creativity is needed to react and stay in close contact with people". At the Catholic Mission in Wohlen-Lenzburg," said Sr. Cristina Compagno, "we did not remain locked up and afraid." *Instead, we "put ourselves on the line, in the belief that those five loaves, donated to Christ, would fill baskets and dispel dread and fear."* Every day, by phone, "we reached out to the

faithful, the sick, the healthy, the sad, and the frightened, with a voice, a word of comfort and encouragement, with nearness that from heart to heart transcends also the absence of physical contact." The restrictive measures are slowly and cautiously being eased. In-person Mass celebrations have resumed, in compliance with the number of people allowed and health regulations. Now it's possible to "look into each other's eyes, share smiles, and above all, live the Sacraments together, taking in the Body and Blood of Christ, the Bread-Body donated true and present, in the Eucharist."

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