



MIAMSI NEWSLETTER N°7

International Movement of apostolate in independent social milieus

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EDITORIAL

Dear friends

In this Newsletter you will find testimonials from our various continents concerning the crisis triggered by the Coronavirus.

It is a health, relationship, economic and cultural crisis. This whole unpredictable epidemic gives us new experiences and we realize that the world must change. We can experience a complete conversion and create a civilization based on love, justice and peace.

Let us be brave and support such inevitable changes by transforming our way of thinking imbued with our faith in Jesus Christ.

Maryse Robert
President

The current situation in our various continents

Africa:

Since the new Coronavirus (Covid-19) appeared last December, it has affected 32,182 people in Africa, of whom at least 1,428 have died, while 5,478 have been declared cured. The most affected countries after South Africa (4,546) are Egypt with 3,032 cases, 224 deaths and 701 cured, Algeria with 3,382 cases, 425 deaths and 894 cured. Overall, the situation is less alarming than in the rest of the world. It is true that the situation is changing from day to day, the figures may be questionable and the means of response may differ from those in developed countries.

Unlike citizens of developed countries in America, Europe and Asia, the vast majority of Africans have a non-wage income. How many people have a monthly salary and who can wait two, three or even four weeks without working and living on a monthly income? How, in a context where most heads of families feed them with the income from the day before, can people decree a general, long-lasting lockdown without notice? After implementing solutions applied everywhere else and « swing-wing » containment measures, a gradual easing of lockdown is currently underway.

Latin America (Brazil):

Given the unprecedented scope of the current crisis where all humanity is involved in the coronavirus pandemic, perplexity is the word that best defines how we feel.

We are experiencing this pandemic like a world war against a powerful but invisible enemy, known only for its volatility and consequences. We are impatiently waiting for these consequences because we will have to face a new, unknown socio-economic reality in the midst of the crisis.

However, we know that we will not be going back to the world we know until the beginning of next year. For better or worse, the world will no longer be the same, as there will be irreversible

changes in ways of thinking, culture, behaviour and personal habits.

Tragically, Covid-19 has shown up the huge social inequality in the Brazilian population and the level of poverty there was which has increased with job insecurity.

Due to people's housing conditions, it has become obvious that a large part of the population can't possibly social distance. And this social distance has been an urgent necessity to flatten the curve of the pandemic and prevent collapse of the public health system

On the other hand, social distancing has the side effect of undermining the economy, which will cause a deep crisis in coming months, depending on the economic measures taken by the government to meet the population's needs. For example, they will have to adopt a Life Annuity, which is quite questionable in a neoliberal economy. The virus has spread all over the country, which has had an impact on several aspects of Brazilian society, as the Brazilian regions will face peaks of the disease at different times.

The pandemic has revealed an irresponsible president, denying how serious the coronavirus is and its power to contaminate. In addition to changing the Health Minister at the height of the pandemic, Bolsonaro participated in a popular demonstration organized by his supporters, aimed at violating the rule of law by closing down the National Congress and the Federal Supreme Court. Irresponsible decisions, statements and behaviour are aggravating the already weakened economic and social situation, we have a political crisis on our hands in Brazil.

Asia:

India, with a population of 1.35 billion spread over 28 states and 8 Union territories, 65% of the 1.35 billion living in rural India and with only 63% of the total population being educated, the world can understand what the coronavirus might have done to us, in such a large country with most of its people living in villages right now, I am really proud that our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown the whole world the way to lead a country

in crisis, we are a third world country with our limits of population, poverty and illiteracy. I am sure we have done much better than the more developed nations. The total number of cases infected with corona is 27,890 of which 6,523 people have recovered and we have recorded only 881 deaths nationwide. This is one piece of information because as of 27April we have an 88% recovery rate. Our Prime Minister had decided that the country should be locked down from the start, we closed our borders to inbound and outbound international travel and we were in complete isolation; while I am writing this report to you, my state of Tamil Nadu is still locked down, but I'm very happy because I'm safe.

We have also had our share of major issues with 28 states and 8 Union territories, people are moving from one state to another in search of a job and a better life with the current lockdown and state borders are closed, migrant workers are stranded far from their places of origin, the government is doing its best, but migrant workers have their own share of problems, without jobs finances are exhausted in many cases, they don't even have a place to stay ; it's definitely a very bad situation but most states are doing their best to supply food and shelter.

Europe (Italy):

Social activity, which started with interest and enthusiasm, has been stopped since 9 March, in fact meetings between groups were cut off abruptly so that thoughts and emotions are communicated via 'chat' on Whatsapp. In this way we were able to contribute to buying masks for the medical and nursing staff! But the deep feeling is that of being invaded by an emergency as serious as it was unexpected, which has swept away our freedom and everyday certainties and against which we can do little or nothing. It seems to us, as it did to Jesus' disciples on Lake Tiberias, that we were forced to get on a boat to reach the other shore, when the wind was blowing against us. Like the disciples, we felt alone and afraid. Then, like Peter, we turned to look at the Lord and heard his words: "It is I, do not be afraid!" And like Peter we trusted him to reach the other side,

to share the insecurity of all those who are different and far from us. Through the storm of life, sometimes we think we are left alone, Jesus seems absent, then he appears like a ghost on the sea, then it is a voice that encourages and, in the end, a firm hand that holds us up. Adding His strength to ours, He supports our hope, scans the horizon with us to discover the first light of dawn. This is our way on the boat of life on an often rough sea! (Messina)

Madagascar:

The numbers are gradually climbing and the police have their work cut out to enforce lockdown. The main roads are more or less well under control, but people travel along side roads and tracks, especially on motorbikes.

We received our face masks yesterday – 3-ply and washable - made by an export processing company that normally works for Paris fashion houses such as Yves St Laurent etc. Which just goes to show, haute couture can come in handy in the end.

In any case, I will have at least one luxury item (in fact two) in my wardrobe ... and free to boot.

How is the epidemic developing? The number of cases is rising - there are currently 186 cases, of which 105 have recovered, 81 hospitalized ; there are over ten new cases reported daily, but none is serious and there have been no deaths so far.

3 regions are "locked down" - those of Tana, Tamatave and Fianar, and the authorities are struggling to prevent the virus from spreading to other regions that are still unaffected, but it is difficult, especially due to the tradition of the family tomb that means travelling all over the country for funerals.

At first, lockdown was fairly strict for a month, but the economy took a big hit and they had to lighten up to let the informal sector and transport get back to work, and exam classes back to school. But the downside has been an increase in cases of contamination. Fortunately, we have the famous CovidOrganics, or CVO, which means people have a treatment that gives hope. My husband took a whole prophylactic course, I drank a few bottles, but it's a bit too much for me. I prefer to follow another treatment based

on virucidal essential oils produced by our daughter's company, which also provides hand sanitizing gel and air purifier, all based on essential oils and alcohol.

On the business side, things are very slow, we only have 1 or 2 customers per month, and we will be forced to use our savings from next month if this situation persists, but we are very lucky compared to others and can't complain.

We keep on praying. My sister's Carmelites in England have to their credit at least one case of recovery from Covid 19 (which made headlines in the media too) if not several!

This situation reminds us that we are truly in the Lord's hands, which we tend to forget when we make our plans for the future. The Pope said (presciently?) In his Lenten letter, written in October 2019, that we have this "illusion of being the masters of our time." That is why I will not talk about our concerns for the future and about work; experience has taught me that very often, the misfortunes we worry about most don't happen, but on the other hand, we are floored by the unpredictable. There is a reason for that....!

THE FUTURE

Africa:

Why is it important to think about **future prospects** today? It is important to think immediately after events so as not to be caught off guard. So the post-coronavirus situation merits reflection at our level, we who have chosen to evangelize independent milieus. The health crisis has already triggered an economic crisis. But in Africa there was already an economic crisis together with a day-to-day security crisis. And these crises, if not dealt with immediately, risk bringing on a social crisis. One crisis risks being followed by another, then others, and we will go from one crisis to the next. It is important to show how we officials can anticipate and bring up issues in our movements ? More specifically, while staying within the framework of our office, it is about stepping back and thinking about the future since the present is already taken care of by governments and several non-state players such as Caritas.

- How **are we experiencing** this pandemic? There is no particular way of experiencing the pandemic that has caught everyone off guard other than following the authorities' recommendations and assisting them in efforts to promote the fight against the pandemic. So in Benin, members of the movement have been engaged with others in raising awareness about complying with preventive measures and even in donating handwashing devices and face masks. Free distribution of handmade masks was necessary because some people couldn't afford to buy them due to poverty. In Niger as elsewhere, society is faced with double insecurity: attacks by armed bandits and the COVID 19 pandemic. Here and there we have seen demonstrations by young people dissatisfied with the curfew, with civil society expressing its disagreement with certain measures taken by the authorities in the context of the anti-jihadi fight, and people are resigned and sometimes rebelling. In Congo, food stores have been looted and people have not been afraid to confront the police because for them it is better to die from the virus outside than to die of hunger by staying locked down. At the continental level, the macroeconomic consequences will be dire as growth rates will fall and in the short term poverty will increase despite debt interest repayments being suspended.

- What **transformations** are we seeing? The transformations in sight will show up over time but already achievements will carry on such as complying with preventive measures, following the rules of hygiene and cleanliness. Parents will pay more attention to their children since recently families have had the opportunity to live and pray together.

In national movements, groups and teams that had difficulty coming together for various reasons can now favour video conferences using modern communication techniques and postpone physical gatherings.

Motivating people (resource people and other facilitators) and/or organizing young people to provide academic support for the youngest so as to continue home lessons via the media (radio, television, smartphones).

- As officials, **how do we support our movements**? There was a time when teams were banned from meeting so we first had to take up from where we left off and mobilize the troops by

reminders to avoid getting discouraged and giving up.

- How do we **see the future**? After the pandemic how will we be careful **not to carry on as we did before**? It will be a matter of supporting all those who have invested in solidarity and voluntary actions in favour of the weakest during the response to continue, i.e. distance learning for students deprived of schools and preparing for exams. As Independent Milieus, how are we going to **support our societies** for a different world ?

Reflect on practical implementation of the preferential option for the poor and assistance to the weakest not by multiplying structures but by ensuring they are operational

Set up or reactivate and direct a post-Covid19 management observatory: monitoring and proper use of the resources collected to deal with the pandemic, for instance.

I am convinced that other proposals will emerge over time as the reflections and initiatives that have just started must continue.

Latin America:

Bolivia.

Maintaining quarantine, some groups opt for virtual meetings that have facilitated the reincorporation of members who migrated and maintain contact with other youth in the region. Personally, some members are involved in fundraising for the soup kitchen, socially disadvantaged families, hospital equipment, etc.

Brasil.

RCB members dealt with the pandemic in different ways. Aid is provided to the most needy by making face masks for the people (Recife), reflecting on the theme of Love and Freedom (Rio de Janeiro), remaining in isolation as much as possible, while continuing to serve the most needy (San Pablo).

RCB shared the testimony of an experience of solidarity and organization in the face of the needs to face the pandemic: in Paraisópolis, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of San Pablo. With organization and effort they have developed an emergency plan. (For more details, see TESTIMONIALS)

Chile.

The pandemic spreads and causes anxiety especially in Santiago. Verónica Carvajal writes in "Walking together" ... we are given the opportunity to learn to live differently and also to realize how ephemeral our life in the world is. Let's break in with the truth and love ". The Abela Vacaflor family is organized to collaborate with the feeding of a group of Bolivian migrants who cannot return to their country due to the closure of borders.

Paraguay.

Solidarity and general mutual aid, especially in the collection and distribution of food.

The movement has individual actions to highlight for the commitment to face: the preparation of virtual classes of excellent level in the university, the aid programs of the Social Pastoral, assistance actions in the agricultural and real estate sector (do not fire employees and keep them salaries despite the resulting economic damage, reduction of managers' salaries, help with food basket etc.)

Perú.

Cases increase and the situation worsens due to covid 19, the health system is collapsed. There are needs of all kinds, even hunger. The bases of the Movement are made up of very old people and have difficulties in virtual meetings; not so the young people who try to integrate other young people.

Members of the movement personally help with food collection. Several members lost their jobs as a result of the unleashed economic crisis.

Uruguay.

Taking advantage of technology they hold virtual meetings. They are finishing the LOOK stage of the central theme. There are particular actions of help.

The government is generally accepted and there are people from the movement in the political establishment, making themselves "felt" positively.

Uruguay copes with the pandemic successfully: the health system is fine and not collapsed; almost 50% of those infected are recovered and education is favored by the fact that almost every child has a computer.

As a region, it is clear that the pandemic has exposed our differences and especially our deficiencies. But it also implies an opportunity to

face the future with Hope, Faith and Charity. We still have a long way to go, we have not yet reached the plateau of the curve and we have an arduous path of descent.

Post-pandemic societies will obviously be different and we will have to face issues such as the role of the State to save fractured economies, the transformation of the labor regime (regulation of distance work), the needs of the public health system, education for a world differently, the opening or closing of borders, the search for greater international scientific cooperation.

As members of MIAMSI we must support and encourage:

- Greater solidarity at all levels
- The awareness that nations and peoples are interconnected, therefore, cooperation, not competition, must be the fundamental value of our personal and international relations;
- Facing the psychological and affective effects that isolation causes, since we are beings created to interact and live together
- That each member assumes their role, their political, technical and financial capacity to face the pandemic that is unleashed and the consequences that derive from it.

As for the Secretariat, we began a work of reflection on the future of the international movement, its need for growth and the postponement of GA. The Covid 19 presents us with new challenges.

Asia:

Of course, this is a daunting task and our Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, has assured the state government of all possible assistance, the central government has announced plans to bail out industrial and commercial firms, many forms of tax have been cancelled and a 3-month moratorium has been provided for repaying bank loans, both for individuals and businesses.

Covid-19 has opened our eyes, with complete lockdown and no movement of people and vehicles, the air we breathe, the water we drink is cleaner and above all we have learned to social distance and hygiene. We also see animals and birds coming out of their habitat onto our roads and into our cities, how shameful !! Finally, Covid

19, which is killing millions of people in the world, has taught us a lesson on how we have abused the earth. With all the catastrophe surrounding us, I can understand why people curse the Coronavirus, especially those who have lost their loved ones, but I pray to the world community to rise up and understand the situation we are in and try to take or learn something good from today. This pandemic has helped people and society to come together, there is a long way to go.

The situation we face is the first of its kind in our generation, economies are declining, manufacturers and businesses will close, unemployment will get out of control, the world will not be the same, there will be a new order and we must then wait to SEE, JUDGE AND ACT.

Indian Ocean Islands:

This pandemic marks a turning point in our economic relations, it highlights our interdependence, with borders closing, businesses shutting down, which has led to production ending abruptly, and even seeing supply disrupted in our countries (e.g. health safety equipment- face masks, sanitizers, ventilators, etc.)

The pandemic is particularly hard on the poorest and most vulnerable of us, highlighting the risks associated with growing inequality.

Safeguarding health in this way and economic shutdown are not compatible with a sustained lockdown.

The economic impacts of Covid-19 will be significant in our countries. How severe the impact is will depend on how long the the pandemic lasts and how much aid the governments of our countries provide.

In the poorest families, losing their jobs with no income when work was the means of putting food on the table, these people will see their incomes fall leading to greater inequality.

Financial assistance for such situations should be a priority for our leaders.

In the medium term, the issue will arise of structural changes to be made in order to boost

our resilient economic and social capacities (health, education, jobs).

I am currently part of a group working for the French government on ending lockdown and the post-crisis with different business sectors where all these points are discussed including of course health security measures. This is a novelty.

We must be careful about our choices and economic model for a better world.

Europe (Italy):

A touching and eloquent way of the cross ... God, being good and all powerful, allows physical and moral evil but never leaves us alone. True loneliness is in the heart. Like a skilled educator, he applies the strategies he thinks are most useful. "Nothing is impossible with God." In the evening silence, moved and impressed, I reviewed a part of my life! I have seen painful facts and experiences, but I have always seen good come from bad. This is the hope that I still harbour today: we will emerge from the Covid 19 scourge as better people.

Never has the Way of the Cross, celebrated by the Pope in front of St Peter's Basilica, been so deeply touching and humanly shared as it was this time. For us in this period of forced lockdown when we sometimes complain, we note how useful it has been to reflect on the conditions of those who live in detention facilities, paying for their own faults and fearing for the future! But we have felt how, with God's help and those who assist Him, some people manage to see in divine mercy the light that can guide them and give new meaning to life. May the Lord also help us to emerge transformed from this period of trials and may the loss of these days translate into rediscovering the true values that must give meaning to our lives (Calabria Region).

To the question of how to live our faith as a sign of hope and on what action to take, we have these little indications: to live faith sincerely, i.e. as if we were carefree and bold, in family life and social relationships, deep within our consciousness. Perhaps this is the time to be more explicit, more visible in our way of being a bearer of faith and hope: in what way? Despite social distancing, we can use the means of communication that technology provides us, perhaps forcing ourselves to learn and use such

media, perhaps those used by our grandchildren to whom we can turn to learn and establish a dialogue on subjects closer to the young. We must act, each in their own area, be it private and public, small or large, in accordance with this hope without being overcome by discouragement and so be a bearer of positivity: with family, friends, and our neighbour. At this time when the whole country is in an economically precarious situation, let us be charitable according to our own possibilities and choices, by supporting all those initiatives that are directed towards the common good, and thinking of the least of us, the most disadvantaged ones.

Let us welcome the prayer of Pope Francis, serve and be brave.

Testimonials

BRAZIL

The miracle of sharing in the Paraisopolis slum:

Paraisopolis is a poor neighbourhood in the south of Sao Paulo that is next door to, and in stark contrast with, Morumbi, an upper middle class neighbourhood.

The community has about 100,000 people in 21,000 homes.

Of this population, 20,000 are elderly people who are constantly monitored by the community.

The houses are made of wood and brick, but what concerns the Residents Union is the housing conditions, with access to water and hygiene products.

The outskirts of the city are home to the maids, doormen, drivers, delivery men, informal workers who have to take the buses and metro to sell their goods and bring home the bacon and, above all, local shopkeepers who can't close their businesses.

People are not waiting for the government to act because the favela is not a priority with regard to public services, as the inhabitants have learned by experience.

Preparing to combat the virus spreading in Paraisopolis:

Up against the pandemic, the favelas, outskirts, ghettos and the entire fringe population once again have to rely on their luck because the state

is not there to help.

The basic recommendations from medical and government authorities to prevent the disease have been hand washing and self isolating.

How can they be met if there is no water in the favela? Stay at home, isolate yourself, without any guarantee that this population on the outskirts will be able to buy at the very least sanitizer and alcohol to help prevent contamination?

And are bosses ready to let any of these workers self-isolate and then pay their wages?

The advantage of effective isolation to contain the virus proves how unequal Brazilian society is. There are ten, twelve, fourteen people living together in very small rooms in the same house.

Plan adopted by the residents' association.

Since 19 March, community leaders have adopted a new strategy to fight the pandemic: organizing, contracting with health professionals, renting equipment, setting up emergency centres.

Organizing:

First, they used the community card and elected 840 volunteers as "street presidents" and "vice-presidents" working in pairs, responsible for monitoring residents' health in 50 houses.

They are then responsible for reinforcing self-isolation instructions with accurate information, as well as supporting the delivery of donated food and cleaning material.

Street leaders from the Paraisopolis favela gather on a football field to define anti-coronavirus measures such as handing out cleaning products and sanitizer to residents.

Specialized Staff Contract:

7 health professionals have been hired, including 2 doctors, 3 nurses and 2 paramedics.

This structure is available 24/24 to provide assistance.

Around fifty caregivers have also been hired to work in each household for three months.

Equipment:

3 ambulances have been rented, 2 ordinary ones and 1 ICU (Intensive Care Unit).

Emergency centres:

There is no base in Paraisopolis for the Samu - the

public medical emergency service.

Despite already having 3 medical service stations and a more complex 24-hour service, emergency centres have been improvised in 2 public schools for residents who tested positive for Covid-19 and who are at high risk at home - the elderly and people with chronic diseases. The centres have beds, bathrooms, a laundry, a kitchen and an ambulance on call.

The structure already has accommodation capacity for 260 patients and should be enlarged to accommodate up to 1,000.

Number of people infected and deceased on April 16

Monitoring has proven effective on a daily basis. However, this emergency medical care programme and calls by community leaders to self-isolate have not been able to contain the coronavirus in this favela.

Within two weeks, suspected infections rose from 60 to 200.

Conclusion

This story has shown that all the Gospel principles are lived out in practice in this poor community of working people who are forgotten most of the time by the authorities in terms of services and care.

Looking at the feeding of the 5 thousand, we can see that there is:

- One direction: the Residents Union that worries, warns, plans and takes care of the inhabitants in the face of a threat that may be devastating.
- The crowd being organized into small groups so that all are served equally.
- Groups share their time, poverty and skills because they have social and emotional relationships, they know their neighbours' real needs...

The pandemic has reached them but not caught them off guard.

This experience in Paraisopolis is nuclear, unlike what is happening in our cities, demonstrating that the care of people in a community is done through small groups, people who communicate under the centralized direction of a residents' association. Initiatives are taken according to needs of all and according to the means available in the locality.

ITALY:

Rebirth after the coronavirus

A letter from the **Rinascita** national leader. This word, this reality has been with me for twenty years, as many years as I have spent in the Rinascita Cristiana Movement. I must say, however, that I have never felt it so alive and trembling in me as at this moment! Being reborn after being infected by the coronavirus with all its evil power is hard and painful. I am not only talking about physical pain but above all about psychological suffering; an overwhelming experience of death and life. I never thought I would personally experience the words of Psalm 23 (22) "The Lord is my shepherd" Yes, I found myself in that "valley of the shadow of death" and there I found the Lord, the good shepherd who was waiting for me, he showed me the path with his "stick" and his "crook", supported me and gave me the strength to make it through. I physically felt the strength and power of the prayers of the whole Rinascita community and many other people, even some who, as they said, were atheists. I was exhausted and He gave me a drink; while I was trapped in this "bullet" that was taking my life from lungs attacked by the disease, I asked for His help and He did not refuse it. The fear that I felt in myself and read in everyone's eyes disappeared: the certainty of a cure, even a remote one, became obvious and smiled at me: "Happiness and grace will accompany me all days of my life." And in this place of pain I saw all the beauty of the human beings, the nurses and doctors who put in exhausting shifts, their efforts to save as many lives as possible, filled with this inner strength that urges them to help, to wrest young and old from death without feeling tired and fatigued.

Whether in teams or only on call in the emergency room, they have shown the world that the spirit of solidarity and altruism exists. This evil that has hurt the whole world has also shown that love triumphs, that mankind is not intrinsically bad. Mankind is intrinsically good and bad; often in life's circumstances only the bad side shows up, selfishness, greed, violence, but actually inside each of us there is also love and solidarity. The challenge is to successfully recognize and express our inner wealth. Wars and injustice then have the good side put into our hearts to find the strength to clear the ground

and revive this seed of love which has been sown in all our hearts by God's mercy, sometimes it seems impossible, almost inconceivable. On the contrary, we must force ourselves to believe that the world will emerge from this pandemic changed for the better. This world that is now at a standstill in our silence, broken by the number of deaths that we listen to every day, will change the paradigm. It will be different and better. Our effort should tend not to consider this devastating time as a blip in the course of human evolution, but to experience it as a true spiritual change, something deeper that brings us back to life. In the strength of our fragility we should be able to rediscover the strength to change things. We are "relationships" and must continue to be in the new forms of relationships that will certainly arise, relationships with others, with those who are close or far away, with the Earth that hosts us and keeps moving on although the world is at a standstill: flowers bloom, life flourishes in meadows and on trees, born again as life is miraculously reborn in the tears and smiles of each newborn baby who these days shows trust in life and tells us: "love will make you resist." We find ourselves meditating The Word while we listen to the rustling of budding leaves and only then do we understand how much beauty and love has been given to us without our sometimes being fully aware of it. Let us approach the Lord's Passover with renewed faith, with the spirit of Rinascita and carry on our way by repeating the psalm attahimadi (Psalm 22) "You are with me more than ever," chosen for evangelizing independent milieus. The health crisis has already triggered an economic crisis. But in Africa the economic crisis already existed together with a day-to-day security crisis. And if these crises are not dealt with immediately, they risk causing a social crisis. One crisis risks being followed by another one, then others, and we will go from one crisis to another.

If you have other testimonials or queries, please send them to us, they will be posted on the MIAMSI website.

Information:

The board met online on 2 May 2020. The global pandemic and its consequences: the stricken economy in all countries, closed borders and lack of transport led us to decide **to postpone this general assembly to 2021**. We'll inform you of the future dates as soon as possible.