

Bolivia and the challenges of the pandemic

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We, the Community of San Ramón, live 200 kilometres from the city of Trinidad, capital of the department of Beni. By decree of the President, we started lockdown in our country on March 21. In our city, we follow the rules strictly, only one person per family over 18 years old can go out (once a week and carrying their identity card) to buy food. People with chronic illnesses, children and the elderly do not go out. Everything was controlled by military guards.

On May 20, the first Covid-19 case was reported in San Ramón and on May 22 the first patient died. The tragedy started like this: after the death of the first patient, health professionals started to get sick, the hospital collapsed, the medicines in the pharmacies were depleted, there was no transportation, the hospital ran out of medicines and every day 2 to 3 people died. People despaired and food ran out. The city's top officials were infected and a 46-year-old officer died.

A city of 5,000 inhabitants, which reported deaths every day, was left without authorities, medicines, food, transport or financial services, as all the workers at the single bank were infected. We, with the help of friends, got some medicines to help the poor people, who had colds. We also shared with people the little food we had.

In the midst of uncertainty, we thought it would be opportune to contact the city authorities and suggest that they make a video asking help from the people. We did so and the video was made. This video was broadcast on social networks, television channels in the country, and other media. Thanks to this initiative, people organized "solidarity aid groups". As a result, planes with medicines and personal protective equipment began to arrive at the hospital, as well as food for the poor. In the face of such an emergency, some groups in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz requested our collaboration to receive 19 drugs for Covid-19; with that, we opened a temporary "Solidarity Pharmacy".

At that time, the city of San Ramón was declared a "health disaster". Therefore, a group of volunteer doctors from Santa Cruz came to San Ramón to help. They

made home visits to care for the sick in their homes. On the other hand, members of the 'National State' arrived in San Ramón with oxygen and food.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, we Sisters, the parish priest and some lay people have helped the poor in food campaigns. We have used social networks to find and organize aid. We also organized night vigils and prayer networks. We pray the rosary with the families, with the help of WhatsApp and Zoom. We accompany the families who lost their relatives by praying the novena of the deceased on Facebook.

In less than one month, 44 people died. There is no exact number of how many cases of Covid-19 are there so far, because there is no proof. According to the doctors' report, 90% of the population had Covid-19.

After this period of suffering and anguish, the situation improved. Some patients are still in the process of recovery. There are no more deaths by Covid-19 and the hospital is empty, but the lockdown continues, although less strict. We continue to deliver medicines and receive groups that distribute food to the poorest people in the city.

We are now dedicating ourselves to accompanying some people who have symptoms of post-Covid-19 depression. The struggle continues and challenges us to be ready to collaborate in this uncertain time.