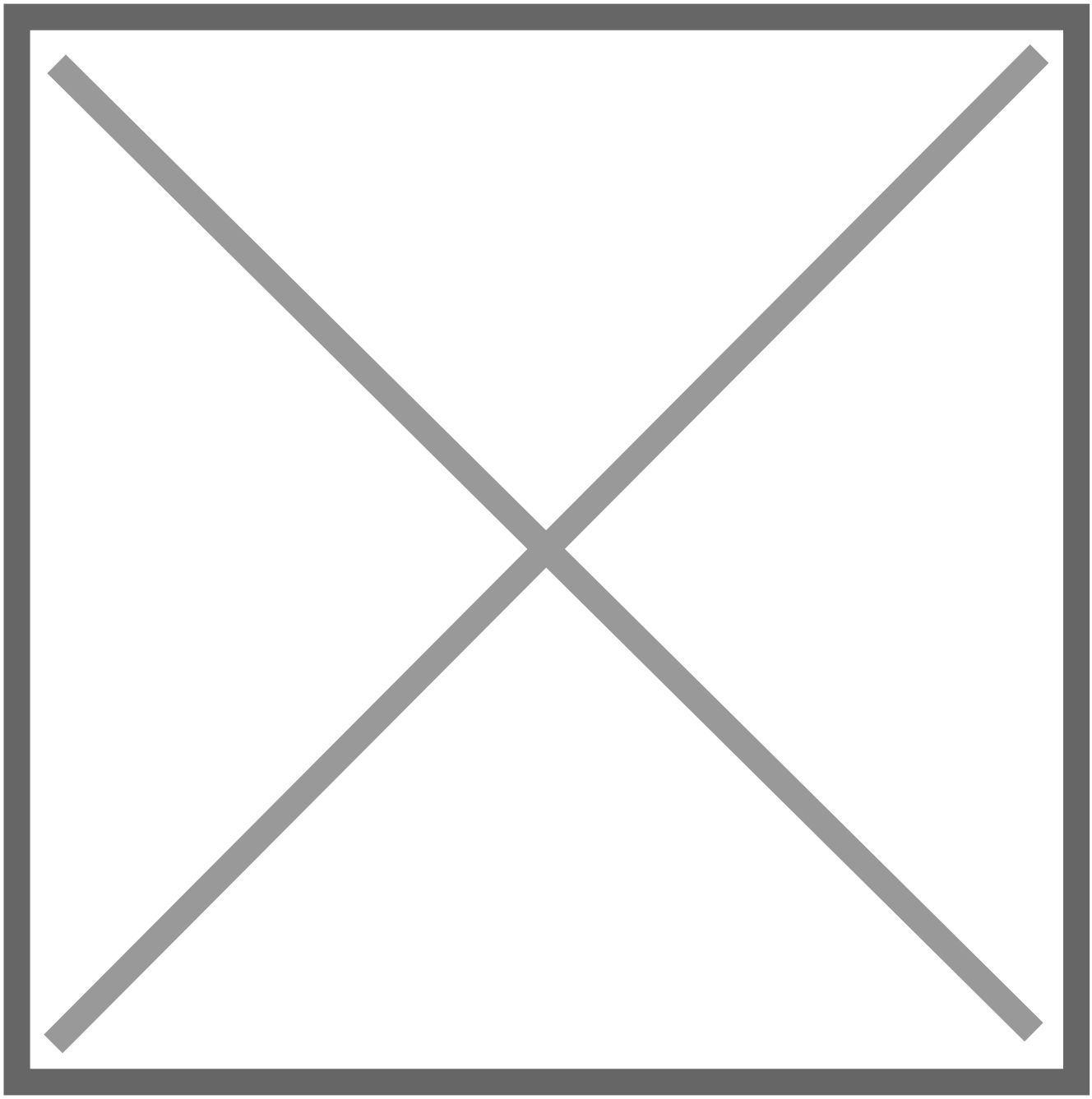
Vatican
News



A health care worker, masked for protection from COVID-19, cares for an unsheltered person at the Pope Francis Center in Detroit in May 2020. The pope is scheduled to mark World Day of the Poor with a Mass and charitable efforts to feed the poor and look after their medical needs. (CNS/Jim West)

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Even during a global pandemic, the World Day of the Poor will be an important opportunity for parishes to highlight the importance of charity and spiritual comfort for those in need, said a Vatican official.

Although restrictions meant to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus have meant some initiatives had to be canceled or modified, the Nov. 15 day remains an occasion for dioceses around the world to "keep alive a sense of attention and fraternity toward the most marginalized and disadvantaged," said Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, which coordinates the World Day of the Poor activities.

At a Vatican news conference Nov. 12, the archbishop detailed what the Vatican and the Diocese of Rome had planned.

Pope Francis was to celebrate Mass in St. Peter's Basilica Nov. 15 in the presence of 100 people, who will represent those around the world who face poverty as well as volunteers and benefactors who assist them, he said. The Mass will be livestreamed at vaticannews.va.

Instead of the mobile health clinic, which is usually set up in St. Peter's Square for the week, and lunch for 1,500 people with the pope, he said the papal almoner's

office has been operating a smaller clinic under the colonnade in the square offering free COVID-19 swab tests for people who need them in order to stay at a homeless shelter or to return home abroad. For the past two weeks, they have conducted about 50 tests a day, he said.

Mobile units also will be parked in different locations on the outskirts of Rome offering free HIV and hepatitis-C tests, he added.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, 2.5 tons of pasta will be given to local soup kitchens and charities, and 5,000 care packages will be distributed to families in need in Rome. Each box will contain quality brand-name staple foods, face masks and a prayer card from the pope.

About 350,000 face masks will be given to 15,000 students in the city to alleviate costs for families in need and to invite students "not to underestimate the risks of the pandemic, especially with behaviors that could be harmful once they return from school to their families with the presence of elderly people," the archbishop said.

Priests and chaplains can download a pastoral guide in five languages from the council's website, to help make sure the day is not just dedicated to charitable activities, but is supported by prayer, eucharistic adoration and other spiritual endeavors "that can never be lacking in order for our witness to be complete and effective," he said.

The pope's message for the day was made public in June and the day's theme is "Stretch forth your hand to the poor."

Concrete signs and gestures are necessary every day, especially at a time when so many people find themselves in difficulty because of the pandemic, the archbishop said.

"Now is a good time to recover the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world," the pope said in his message.

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