A volunteer with the Italian Red Cross stands in St. Peter's Square Nov. 10, 2022, ready to we

A volunteer with the Italian Red Cross stands in St. Peter's Square Nov. 10, 2022, ready to welcome anyone who wants a free medical exam or blood test being offered by volunteer physicians, nurses and medical students as part of the Vatican celebration of the World Day of the Poor. (CNS photo/Cindy Wooden)

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Vatican City — November 10, 2022

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As part of the Vatican celebration of World Day of the Poor, a dozen doctors and nurses and 90 medical students set up shop in St. Peter's Square.

"We know there are people who need medical care and are not getting it, so our aim is to offer exams and blood tests and make referrals to specialists," said Dr. Giuseppe Marinaro, an emergency room physician from Padua, who was on duty in the square Nov. 10.

While the primary goal is to help the poor, especially those living on the streets around the Vatican, the presence in the square of three campers modified as clinics also is "a provocation," said Archbishop Rino Fisichella of the Dicastery for Evangelization, which coordinates the World Day of the Poor events. "The poor exist and there are more of them than most people think. This is a reminder."

"The poor evangelize us," Fisichella said. "The poor allow us all -- believers and nonbelievers -- to understand an essential of the Gospel, which is to serve others," especially the most vulnerable.

The "field hospital" in the square opened Nov. 7 and was to offer free medical services to anyone who asked from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day through Nov. 13, the day the church marks the World Day of the Poor.

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The all-volunteer staff -- which included members of the Italian Red Cross, medical charities and Italian medical associations -- were offering patients normal physical exams, electrocardiograms, ultrasounds, blood tests, flu vaccines and COVID-19 tests.

"Up to now, we have not had any emergency situations," said Nicole Laforgia, project manager for Doctors for Africa, one of the groups on duty Nov. 10.

The exams revealed plenty of cases of diabetes and high blood pressure, but the patients already knew their diagnosis and were receiving care, she said. The Vatican clinic included a pharmacy to help those needing more medication.

All of the volunteer physicians and nurses have full-time jobs as well, Marinaro said. But "if someone wants to help, they'll find the time."