News
Religious Life



Members of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit sew face masks at the general house in Rome. Although the masks do not have filters and so cannot be donated to hospitals, the sisters and members of their community wear them when they must go out to the grocery store or pharmacy. (CNS/courtesy of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit)

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While most of the work at a religious order's general headquarters continues in lockdown, a group of Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit found an additional activity where they could use their hands, do something together and be useful.

The sisters took to sewing face masks.

"We cannot send them to hospitals, because those masks must have filters," Sr. Eleonora Cichon, a member of the sewing team, told Catholic News Service March 23.

The sisters also are not distributing them to the general public because there is no way to certify their effectiveness at stopping the spread of germs and of the coronavirus, she said. But the 50, triple-layer masks they have made already are in use.

The generalate community includes 40 sisters, eight novices, a priest and two refugee families — one a family of three, the other a family of seven.

"We are all well here in the generalate," she said, "but if we have to go out, we want to protect ourselves and the people we encounter on the street."

Besides, she said, "it's something different to do."

Under Italy's lockdown rules, people can leave their homes to go to the grocery store, the pharmacy or the newsstand. Although they are staying more than a yard away from each other, most people also cover their mouths and noses with something — a mask or a scarf — and many people now wear latex gloves.

Already in early March, Cichon said, the pharmacy nearest the convent had a sign on the door, "Masks sold out." The sign is still there.

The sisters' masks are made of one layer of cotton and two layers of "fabric specially for masks," she said, and are washed after every outing.

And as life goes on in lockdown, she said, the sisters are grateful to have a small yard where the six children of the refugee families can get out and play.

"They cannot go to school now, so especially in the afternoon, they go out and play. They give us life."

And the sisters keep in contact by email and computer with their members and friends around the globe. Many are writing to check on the sisters in lockdown and to offer their prayers, Cichon said.

"People are so good."

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