In the time of the Coronavirus

17 March 2020
Dear Colleagues,

The health situation for the Coronavirus emergency is dramatic in Europe and in Italy in particular. In my country we are locked in the house on government orders, we can go out only for work or to buy food, we use masks; schools are closed; public premises are closed, except for supermarkets and pharmacies, where we can enter a maximum of two and one meter away from each other; cinemas, theaters, parks and museums are also closed; the police check the streets and punish those who are away from home without good reason; our Churches are open, but there are no celebrations, holy masses, weddings and funerals. I go to work by car every day and I walk almost deserted streets. In hospitals, only emergencies are accepted, no ordinary hospitalization or outpatient visits. Doctors and nurses wear personal protective equipment (overalls, gloves, FFP3 masks, gloves): welcome patients with respiratory symptoms, test for Covid-19 and, if positive, provide hospitalization in infectious diseases or in pulmonology, the sick more serious are hospitalized in intensive care. The beds are just enough; if Covid + patients increase further, we will have to use all hospital wards, of any specialty, and the operating blocks will be transformed into intensive care. There are many infected and hospitalized: we are afraid of exceeding only 15,000 cases at the end of the month in Puglia (50% need hospitalization and 10% of intensive care). Unfortunately, doctors and nurses are also infected and ill. We exchange messages, news and opinions on web groups, alleviating fears and anxieties. But daily reality is dramatic. Today in my hospital 5 doctors and 10 nurses have been infected; The emergency room has been closed, but tomorrow it will be necessary to reopen it with doctors and nurses recruited from the hospital wards, making rapid emergency triage courses. Tomorrow I don’t know what else will happen and how we can make up for health workers who will fall ill. All that remains is to trust in the spirit of sacrifice and responsibility of doctors and nurses and in the help of God. Pope Francis yesterday afternoon with his pilgrimage on foot, alone, from Santa Maria Maggiore to the miraculous Crucifix of the church of San Marcellino showed us the way: to ask God, through Mary’s intercession, for the cessation of the pandemic, everywhere. And at the Angelus he reminded us not to be “Don Abbondio”, that is, afraid to cure and be close to the sick, despite the risks and dangers. In fact, this is a time of reference to sobriety and essentiality, a time of inner silence and reflection on fragility and on the meaning of life. We do not have the possibility of the support of the Eucharist, but we have the certainty of the love of the Father. Dear friends, we do not cease to be close, to remember in prayer and above all to be courageous and strong doctors, always ready to serve and to give comfort and hope following the example of the good Samaritan. These days will pass and our communities will find serenity. We will all meet again soon to tell us about this difficult time, in which God has not left us alone. I’m sure.

Bari, March 16th 2020
Vincenzo Defilippis, president of FEAMC