

Interview with Amadeu Rocamora ▶ Review of his term and assessment of the main challenges

Caritas Andorrana helps a dozen homeless non-residents

The president of the organization emphasizes that although poverty is not a serious situation in the country, the few cases

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Caritas Andorrana has helped a dozen homeless people during 2021. The president of the entity, Amadeu Rocamora, explained that sometimes there is a case in which someone comes to the country to look for work, but does not have sufficient financial support to sustain itself. For this reason, he pointed out that «we provide them with food and a stay, but they usually leave again in a few days». Compared to previous years, the number of people with this situation has decreased, but the pandemic is a factor that may have affected it. «We call them passers-by,» Rocamora said, adding that this is a profile that is sometimes «not very clear where they are looking for work, and mostly ends up leaving for other European countries,» he added. On the other hand, the president of Càritas Andorrana detailed that there are a small number of people who «don't know what they do, but they are in Andorra without permission». In this sense, he pointed out that «when they ask us for help, we do not question their nationality or where they live, we only ask what they need, however, then we end up knowing».

In relation to poverty, Rocamora said that «of course it exists, because it is not an absolute concept, but relative». In addition, he reported that currently, in Andorra there are many needy families, which perhaps «in other countries would not be considered poor». He also explained that the cases of Caritas Andorrana are analyzed and, although there are not many, «you are surprised to see the situation of some in a rich country like ours,» he said. On how a person goes through this precarious circumstance, the president of the entity noted that «we ask ourselves many times, and we still can not explain how you end up at this point,» but detailed that in some personal cases who come to Càritas Andorrana, what happens is that «they live misfortunes like an accident, losing their job, or having a basic salary that does not allow them to support their family», as an example.

For all this, Rocamora considered that poverty in the Principality is not a situation that is very serious at the moment, but shared that «the few cases that exist, are very hard». ≡



▶▶ The president of Càritas Andorrana, Amadeu Rocamora.

«Caritas is not an entity that can or should fix everything»

AMADEU ROCAMORA President of Caritas Andorrana

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Amadeu Rocamora has been the president of Càritas Andorrana for six years. He is currently finishing his second and final term. In this sense, he reviews his career in the organization and explains the main activities that it carries out in the country.

-What have been the main challenges you have faced since the beginning of your presidency?

-There have been many challenges. The first was the adaptation, because I had been a volunteer at Caritas of Escaldes-Engordany for more than 20 years and made my contribution. However, there

is a big step from volunteering to being president, because Caritas is still a small entity, but it has 10 employees apart from a lot of volunteers. As president, you have a lot of work to do. The main thing is to coordinate all the work and also decide what actions need to be taken so that our purpose of helping people in need is met. It's a big challenge, especially when you've never done it before, but you're adapting to it: you see the difficulties and you look at how others do it. On the other hand, we are also part of Caritas Europe and Caritas International, and the president's work also includes this external coordination to observe what is happening in each country and how we can collaborate and offer

help to those who need it.

-Why did you decide to get involved in this cause?

-Normally, many of the Caritas volunteers are people who practice and know the body through the church. But personally, I had this interest in helping people. I first collaborated with small financial contributions, and at one point, other members of the organization offered to help me at Càritas Parroquial d'Escaldes-Engordany, and I gladly did so. So, for many years I was on the board helping with what was appropriate and especially with the study of the cases that were presented to us.

-As for your presidency, what lines

of action did you want to prioritize?

-There has been no radical change from the previous lines of action. That is, I consider that they are all important, but at every moment there are needs and it is a question of answering them. One thing I would like to clarify is that Caritas is not an entity that can or should fix everything, as it is a subsidiary of what public administrations do. However, we are all aware that this cannot reach everywhere, and this is where the entities come into play to try to alleviate the needs of a sector of the population, and in general, some aspects that are not addressed, or, in our opinion, they are not well covered. There is another aspect to keep in mind, and that is that NGOs sometimes act with

rozen

...s that exist «are very hard»

CÀRITAS ANDORRANA



«The care system for Caritas users changed with the covid, and some of us may not have been cared for properly»

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-In life you always learn from everything there is, and what we have learned is that humans are very weak. We had security as if we could do everything and eat everything, and he disappeared with an unforeseen illness. What has happened is so extraordinary that it seems we are not yet aware of the impact it has had. For now, we do not know how it will end, but it seems that it will be a virus that we will have to live with.

-Which of the activities you offer has gained strength with the covid-19?

-There have been different phases, because at first, at the beginning of 2020, the main activity was the attention given to temporary workers who were locked up here in Andorra. There were a lot of people, about 500 workers, and so we gave more than 500 batches of food for 15 days, which is outrageous. Luckily, the situation was resolved, but we had never had a lawsuit like this.

However, there were other extraordinary events. For example, at the request of the Government, we made the equipment of the Cuban healthcare workers that came to Andorra. They came in summer dresses, but it was quite cold, so we provided them with anoraks, different overalls, shoes ... it was an important action. It should be noted that we used our Rober, but we had to resort to some companies, which provided us with many changes of

clothes.

On the other hand, the care system for regular Caritas users changed completely with covid, because they could not be served in person, and this speeded up the telephone or telematic customer service systems. This may have caused some of us not to attend to them as they should have, but we tried to put the means in place so that no one was left unattended. By 2021, everything was back to normal, and from the moment there were vaccines we adapted, and care gradually returned to normal.

-Could you assess how it is going this year?

-We have analyzed it quite a bit and what we are saying is that more or less, the situation is the same as we had in the pre-pandemic, with some small but significant changes. For example, there has now been a significant increase in attention to people living alone and who have been affected by the pandemic because they do not have a social network in the country and only come to work. Then, if they lose their job, housing issue or any other branch, they have no one to ask for support. The age range is 25 to 60, but they are usually hardworking people.

-Have you noticed that there is any other vulnerable group?

-There are always vulnerable groups, such as single-parent families, the elderly, children from unstructured or under-resourced families ... But of course, the impact on these groups is very different, due to the aids that there is on the part of the public administration. Sometimes, what we find is that we also have people who are expressing their needs and accompanying them, because they often ask us for things that the administration already plans to cover, and we help them to be able to access these benefits with the help of a social worker. Many times, it is about the ignorance that exists regarding the planned programs.

-Recently, you have introduced a new telephone psychological care service. That is?

-It is a complement, precisely because it consists of being able to help these users who do not have social networks and who we have detected who need to talk to someone and explain what is happening

to them. So, we've seen that the help we offer to the Support Program, which last year served about 30 people through psychological help or legal advice, doesn't work for those who don't dare come to ask for that help. So, the social workers proposed opening a phone line to do first aid and then refer them to a psychologist or whatever is needed. This phone wants to facilitate a first contact, but we don't expect it to have many calls. Along these lines, last Wednesday I asked if any calls had been received and it turns out that someone has already started calling.

-Do you have problems with donations?

-Let's see, no problems, but they are. We, fortunately, have always received it; what is certain is that there are more difficult times. We don't usually campaign to receive donations, but we have regular people, extraordinary contributions, and obviously they are all well received. It is clear that the more we



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receive, the more likely we are to be able to act and do new projects. There are programs that we can't carry out due to lack of money, but when we think it's absolutely necessary we turn to doing it and we manage to pick up what is needed, because if people understand the program and why are you asking them for money, is supportive and will give them.

-Are there any young volunteers?

-Within Caritas, with the tasks we do, most of our volunteers are relatively large people, especially retirees, but there are also some who are working and around 40 years old. Due to the type of action we are

doing here in Andorra, our action needs more help from people of a certain age, in terms of meetings or support issues. Maybe we haven't been able to do better or we haven't looked for programs that need young volunteers, because it is true that from time to time young people are willing to volunteer, and they like it. But we don't know what kind of volunteering we can offer them to get them excited.

AINA, for example, is also a church option and involves young people. It is true that young people are a bit far away from it today, but society has changed a bit and the church will also have to change in one way or another. That is, believers already realize that there are fewer young people, but there are also some who are very enthusiastic. In fact, most of the Food Bank's contributions come to us from donations made to us by school children, especially in the Christmas campaign, where we ask for a specific food contribution to give to other children like they who need it. We usually order oil, rice and preserves, among others, except for fresh food. And with the contribution to the schools, we don't have to ask for more food; it is one of the most successful activities.

-Which activity works best?

-Everyone has their success and their failure. Sometimes the smallest action, such as accompanying a person or giving them advice, is what helps. It's not all about money.

-What has been the collaboration of Caritas Andorrana with the refugees from Ukraine?

-Luckily, they are not people who have fled poverty, but because of the war, which is hard enough. But most of them knew where they were going, some had support in the country, and the church in Andorra has given them a place to attend to them. From Caritas we have helped them with clothes, food and what they have asked us. On the other hand, we have sent donations to Caritas in Ukraine and neighboring countries, and we will continue to do so.

-Do you have future lines of action?

-Specifically not, but we will continue to work to carry out programs to help all kinds of people, be they children or adults. ≡

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