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# CATHOLIC + SAN FRANCISCO

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## Archbishop: Next two weeks 'critical' on resuming Mass

NICHOLAS WOLFRAM SMITH  
CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO

Public liturgies in the church might resume in two weeks if San Francisco continues to successfully manage the coronavirus pandemic, Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone said.

In a May 12 letter to the archdiocese, Archbishop Cordileone wrote, "The next two weeks will be the critical test: San Francisco has "flattened the curve," and if this trend continues, it will be safer to loosen some of the current restrictions on day-to-day activities."

The archbishop said California's bishops have held weekly meetings to discuss reopening procedures that are in line with public health safety protocols. An archdiocesan committee of priests and

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(CNS PHOTO/REMO CASILLI, REUTERS)

## St. Peter's Basilica reopens to public

Nuns walk on the day of St. Peter's Basilica's reopening May 18, 2020, as the Vatican eased measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## San Francisco studies pandemic's impact on Latinos

LORENA ROJAS  
SAN FRANCISCO CATÓLICO

"When I was told that I was infected with the coronavirus, I said, 'My God, I'm in trouble,'" said Gustavo Arévalo, a 48-year-old Guatemalan immigrant who lives in San Francisco.

Arévalo tested positive with COVID-19 on March 30 after several days of feeling unwell and with worsening symptoms.

At about the same time of his diagnosis, his mother, Irene Márquez, 68, had been confined for a week in her apartment near 16th and Mission streets in San Francisco, also with COVID-19.

Arévalo said it was unlikely that they caught it from each other because there was no contact between them in the days prior to testing positive.

Although he can't say for sure where he got the coronavirus, he thinks he may have contracted it at a hospital in San Francisco where he works as a janitor while cleaning the room of a possible COVID-19 patient. He wore a plastic overall and



(PHOTO BY ZAC WITMER/SAN FRANCISCO CATÓLICO)

Irene Márquez, 68, has recovered from COVID-19 and is back at work, but the experience has left her frightened.

shoe covers but there was nothing to cover his face.

Just a few days later, he began to experience

severe body pain, fatigue, fever and loss of taste and smell. Following his doctor's phone recommendations, Arévalo convalesced at home under the care of his wife. Since he didn't have serious breathing issues, he did not need to be hospitalized and was able to return to work almost a month later.

During a phone interview, Arévalo, a parishioner of Church of the Visitacion, said his strong faith and the remote resources offered online by the Catholic Church locally and from Rome – especially during Holy Week – were the spiritual nourishment essential for his recovery.

When asked why so many Latinos in the Mission District in San Francisco were testing positive for COVID-19, he did not rule out the possibility that, like him, so many of them have jobs labeled "essential" and cannot work from home.

Irene Márquez, has also recovered and is back at work, but the experience has left her frightened.

She does not believe she was exposed at the apart-

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# Priest, nurse fortify Nigerian villagers against lockdown hunger

CHRISTINA GRAY  
CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO

God willing, Father Edward Inyanwachi will soon again celebrate Mass for the members of his rural southeastern Nigerian parish. Until then he's trying to keep them from starving.

The pastor of St. Patrick Parish and two mission churches in the Diocese of Abakaliki in Nigeria's impoverished Ebonyi State served several Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of San Francisco when he was a doctoral student here eight years ago, returning to his native parish in 2013.

Over the last two months, Father Inyanwachi has traveled in a truck over dirt roads outside the village to buy food staples that are out of reach — physically and financially — for some parish families amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"The cost of food items, especially the staple foods, is rising each day," he shared in an April 24 email to long-time Holy Name of Jesus parishioner Angela Testani from the village of Uburu-Amachi.

Father Inyanwachi and Testani, a retired San Francisco nurse, met at the parish when the priest visited during his studies at the University of San Francisco. In 2016 they co-founded Mother of Mercy Charitable Foundation out of a mutual desire to improve the lives of the rural poor in Ebonyi, the third-poorest state in Nigeria.

In a May 12 email, the priest told Catholic San Francisco that he sees increasing "panic, anxiety and a sense of hopelessness" among the local people for whom communal practice of their faith at morning Mass at St. Patrick is the center of their lives.

"Usually when there is a disaster, the people are in church asking for the mercy of God," said Father Inyanwachi. "But with COVID-19 that is not the case."

Testani said in a May 7 phone call from her home in San Francisco that the pandemic has increased the hardship and already-heavy burden of poverty for villagers. Father Inyanwachi's food assistance is sustaining the neediest families who were struggling with hunger long before the pandemic hit.

"When you can't preach, you are living God's word by works," Testani said.

The pair and the Bay Area donors who support their mission are making these works and others possible, such as improving access to medical care at a local Catholic hospital, drilling wells for safe drinking water and providing scholarships to local



Rural Nigerian villagers practice social distancing as they wait to receive bags of food and soap provided by San Francisco-based Mother of Mercy Charitable Foundation. Father Edward Inyanwachi, pastor of St. Patrick Parish in the Diocese of Abakaliki in Ebonyi state and co-founder of the nonprofit, is helping sustain his parish members amid the global pandemic crisis. Right, Father Inyanwachi and community members are pictured with bags of food in front of a parish building.

women who want to train as nurses.

"Father Ed," as Testani calls him, included photos in his email dispatches from Abakaliki that showed volunteers separating bulk provisions into smaller bags for distribution. Recipients sat spaced a good distance from one another in a receiving area.

Over 120 village households have thus far received rice, beans, flour, seasoning cubes and soap to sustain them, he reported.

In mid-April, a few weeks after Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari ordered a national lockdown to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

News reports showed looting of food trucks in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city after the government promised food assistance that he said did not arrive. Gangs soon moved in to take advantage of the chaos by going house-to-house to rob people as whole neighborhoods armed themselves with home-made weapons to defend themselves.

"The situation here in Ebonyi State has not gotten bad as that of Lagos, but it is gradually simmering," Father Inyanwachi said.

On March 24, Ebonyi State, like all of Nigeria's 36 states, closed its borders to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

At that time the West African country reported 44 confirmed cases of COVID-19. That was less than a month after the first confirmed case was announced Feb. 27. Two months later, on May 11, the World Health Organization reported 4,399 positive cases and 143 deaths in Nigeria.



(COURTESY PHOTOS)

In a country with a population of almost 200 million people, those numbers seem to reflect relative success in Africa's most populous country. There is a growing hotspot in the city of Kano in northern Nigeria even as lockdown restrictions begin to lift.

Father Inyanwachi considers the village "blessed" without a single identified positive case of the virus. "I say 'an identified positive case' because we have almost no testing going on, not only in the village but in the entire Ebonyi State," he added.

As in other places around the world, Nigeria shows that efforts to contain the virus have compounded pre-existing problems that disproportionately impact the poor.

In Abakaliki, said Testani, the virus peaked at the end of the dry season when home larders of yams and cassava and other local crops are naturally in low supply. Many farmers had just planted their spring crops.

The border closure blocked farm trucks from nearby states from selling their products at the local open market, creating food shortages. The open market is the only affordable option for villagers who can buy or barter to supplement what they might grow themselves.

Shortages have led to price increases far outside the means of most villagers, said Father Inyanwachi.

"Only a few are able to make regular purchases now due to the high cost, and so many families eat only one meal a day," he said.

Water access is also an issue, said

Testani. Most homes in Ebonyi State lack running water, making hand-washing for disease prevention nearly impossible.

"With them not having any clean water on any average day, we panicked," she said.

Even those who might be able to afford to buy food at the open market could not gain entrance without washed hands.

Testani, who spent 3 weeks in Abakaliki in 2016, learned that a combination of poverty, poor nutrition, native superstitions and inadequate health care causes suffering, illness and an early death for villagers of all ages.

She said she believes the villagers are taking the virus restrictions "very seriously," many of them having lived through the West African Ebola crisis that killed more than 11,000 people before it ended in 2016.

There have been some overdoses of anti-malarial medication, she said. In early April, President Donald Trump promoted the experimental use of hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 treatment despite limited information on its efficacy and side effects.

Father Inyanwachi said that morning Mass is a "very important part of our lives here." For many villagers, being away from Mass has been the greatest difficulty.

"Some of them come and hang out outside the church while I celebrate Mass inside," he said.

Visit [mmcharitablefoundation.org](http://mmcharitablefoundation.org).

## Cathedral parishioners cheer archbishop on Good Shepherd Sunday

NICHOLAS WOLFRAM SMITH  
CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO

A group of parishioners at St. Mary's Cathedral celebrated Good Shepherd Sunday, May 3, by thanking Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone for his pastoral care, greeting him on the cathedral plaza with signs and cheers after he finished Mass.

Cathedral pastor and rector Father Arturo Albano, who organized the event, said he had "been looking at the TV, how people show their appreciation for first responders and doctors and nurses, and it occurred to me, maybe we could do something for our spiritual leaders."

Father Albano asked Alexei Lukban, grand knight of the cathedral's Knights



(PHOTO BY DENNIS CALLAHAN, COURTESY ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL)

A group of St. Mary's Cathedral parishioners gathered at the foot of the cathedral steps Sunday, May 3, holding handmade signs and banners to greet Archbishop Cordileone after he celebrated the 11 a.m. Mass.

of Columbus chapter, to organize on short notice a show of support for Archbishop Cordileone.

Knights and other parishioners gathered at the foot of the cathedral steps, holding handmade signs and printed banners to greet Archbishop Cordileone after he celebrated the 11 a.m. Mass.

As he exited the cathedral doors, shouts of "hooray" and "Viva Guadalupe" met him. "There was so much joy in his face, I could see he really felt appreciated," Father Albano said.

Father Albano said parishioners appreciate the archbishop's celebration of daily and Sunday Mass at the cathedral. "The people feel the archbishop is with them during moments of uncertainty, fear and doubt. They see there is a spiritual leader who is with them," he said.