

Nigerian Catholic bishops donate 425 hospitals for COVID-19 treatment

by [Patrick Egwu](#) in the [July 1, 2020](#) issue



Donatus Ajibo, a Catholic priest who runs one of the 425 hospitals donated by the Catholic Church in Nigeria to help the government handle the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo by Patrick Egwu)

With the increasing rate of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria, the Catholic community is responding and supporting the government's efforts to combat the virus.

In May, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria donated 425 church-run hospitals, clinics, and health facilities to the government. The hospitals, which will be

used as isolation centers for coronavirus patients, were handed over to the presidential task force that coordinates the pandemic response across the country.

The bishops also sent priests who have expertise in disease control as volunteers to help with government-wide efforts to control the spread of the virus.

Nigeria—Africa's most populous country—has the highest number of coronavirus cases in the West African region. The first case was reported on February 27, when an Italian man who flew into the country tested positive. By June 2 there were 10,819 confirmed cases with 3,239 recoveries and 314 deaths, according to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.

Nigeria has a weak and often inaccessible health system; the NCDC recently reported that not a single Nigerian state has enough hospital beds to treat patients—and there are only 3,500 bed spaces for COVID-19 patients nationwide.

The World Health Organization and other global health bodies have expressed concern that the pandemic will be devastating for the African continent. The WHO estimates that between 83,000 and 190,000 people in Africa could die of COVID-19, and as many as 44 million people could be infected in the first year if containment measures fail.

Aniedi Okure, executive director of the Africa Faith and Justice Network, said that by donating hospital space, the Catholic Church is taking seriously its call to help society in times of need.

"It shows that the church is rising to the task and challenge of caring for people," he said. "There is a pandemic that everybody is afraid of and traumatized about, and the church steps in to tell the government that we are here to partner with you, and want to work together to bring an end to this so that lives can be saved."

Apart from donating hospitals, the Catholic Church in Nigeria is using its influence to create awareness and help people make important decisions about the pandemic, said Donatus Ajibo, a priest who runs one of the donated hospitals in southeast Nigeria.

"The church is not relenting in supporting . . . and maintaining the standards set for combating coronavirus," he said. "The bishop in my diocese made it clear that all parishioners attending church service will put on face masks and keep safety measures before they can access the church, and this has been adhered to."