

Chinese church charity appeals for medical supplies to fight coronavirus

As deaths continue to rise from the coronavirus epidemic, China faces a severe shortage of medical supplies, according to the only Catholic charity in the communist nation.

Jinde Charities, a government-registered charity, appealed to the universal church for help in procuring medical supplies such as face masks, surgical masks, goggles and eye masks, reported ucanews.com.

“There is a serious shortage of some medical supplies. As the flu has spread all over the country, hundreds of pieces of masks and protective clothing are consumed daily. Medical supplies are not just lacking but dangerously lacking,” said a message from Jinde.



A woman wearing a mask is seen at Lujiazui financial district in Shanghai Feb. 3, 2020, as the country is hit by an outbreak of a new 'novel' coronavirus. CNS photo/Aly Song, Reuters

The Catholic Church's official social services agency, Caritas International, has no local partner in China like most other countries in Asia have. Started in 1997 and officially recognized in 2006, Jinde (advancing love) does the work of Caritas, carrying out the relief work of the church in China.

Ucanews.com reported the charity's Feb. 2 message in Chinese, titled "Urgent appeal from China," said it was seeking help from the universal church.

“So many people are desperately looking for supplies abroad. Our Catholic Church is a church preaching love,” said the message signed by Father Zhang Shijiang, Jinde official.

“Can I order some medical items such as protective clothing and masks for front-line health care workers through the universal church?”

The message said the “urgent need for emergency treatment” has led many medical workers on the front line exposed to a “very dangerous environment.”

Ucanews.com said the virus has claimed the lives of 490 people in mainland China and two elsewhere since the first case was reported in Wuhan city in December. More than 24,500 people are now infected and face the threat of developing choking pneumonia as the contagion continues to spread.



People wearing masks walk near the Ruins of St. Paul's Catholic complex in Macau Feb. 5, 2020, during the 'novel' coronavirus outbreak.CNS photo/Tyrone Siu, Reuters

In addition to Wuhan, the outbreaks in other areas are “also very serious. The number of confirmed and suspected cases of pneumonia is still on the rise, and the rescue of critically ill patients remains severe,” the message said.

Critically ill patients affected with the virus, which has no known medical cure, need nursing care and assistance. However, people assisting them need to protect themselves, as the virus spreads through bodily fluids.

Although China has stepped up its efforts to contain the spread of the virus with the production of protective equipment, efforts could not meet soaring demand, the message said.

Father Shijiang said the shortage of medical staff to fight the disease had also left church members agonized.

“The helplessness and toil that I have experienced in the past few days have made me deeply experience how limited people are. This test

also awakens us to pay more attention, care and help to those who face war in the future," he said.

On Feb. 3, the Vatican press office confirmed a report that, since Jan. 27, it had sent 600,000-700,000 protective masks to China.

"The masks are destined to the provinces of Hubei, Zhejiang and Fujian," the press office told CNS. "It is a joint initiative of the Office of Papal Charities and the Chinese Church in Italy, in collaboration with the Vatican pharmacy."

According to the Global Times report, Chinese Father Vincenzo Han Duo, vice rector of Rome's Pontifical Urbanian College, said the donation was made possible with the help of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner.

The masks were paid for by the Vatican and Chinese Christian communities in Italy, while airline companies, including China Southern Airlines, provided free shipment, the report said.

"I hope the supplies could reach where they are needed as soon as possible, so that people who are suffering the disease could feel the concern from the Holy See. The whole world is standing together to fight the virus," Father Han told The Global Times.

During his Sunday *Angelus* address Jan. 26, Pope Francis expressed condolences to the victims of the virus and his support for efforts to fight its spread.

"I wish to be close to and pray for the people who are sick because of the virus that has spread through China," the pope said. "May the Lord welcome the dead into his peace, comfort families and sustain the great commitment by the Chinese community that has already been put in place to combat the epidemic."