



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **CATHOLIC CHURCH PLAYING ITS PART IN COVID-19 RESPONSE**

The Catholic Church is inviting its various agencies across the country to consider what facilities could be made available to support national efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 within the community.

“The Catholic hospital and aged care network is at the forefront of the Church’s response, offering high-quality, compassionate care to those currently suffering from COVID-19,” said Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

“Catholic priests, religious women and men, pastoral workers and social service agencies are also working on the spiritual, emotional and psychological needs of people affected by the virus directly, as well as those for whom the social distancing and isolation guidelines are a burden. Our teachers are also supporting students, especially the children of essential, front-line workers.

“Catholic parishes, schools, religious orders and other ministries, however, have their own role to play in increasing the capacity of state and territory governments and their health departments to respond to this pandemic.”

Susan Pascoe is chair of the Advisory Council of Catholic Emergency Relief Australia, a collaboration harnessing the Catholic Church’s collective strength in response to crises.

“When this collaboration was emerging in January in response to the bushfire crisis affecting multiple states and territories, we knew it would be in place to coordinate efforts on future national emergencies,” Ms Pascoe said.

“We couldn’t have known how quickly that ‘future’ would become our ‘present’ – and a ‘present’ that has necessitated historic measures from the Commonwealth Government all the way down to individual behaviour.”

Ms Pascoe said a national audit has commenced to understand what Catholic buildings might be put on standby to be made available if more facilities are needed for testing people who could be infected, for people to self-isolate, for front-line workers to be accommodated away from their homes and other reasons.

“With almost 1,400 parishes, more than 1,700 schools and retreat centres, for example, the Church has a variety of facilities like school and parish halls, boarding schools and other buildings that can be used as needed,” she said.

“As a very prominent part of each community across our nation, the Catholic Church has a responsibility in this pandemic, and the Church takes that seriously.”

Archbishop Coleridge said while the circumstances are unique, with most Catholic buildings currently not in use, the national audit will also create a database that could assist in responding to other disasters, with Church properties being utilised as evacuation centres, food banks or for other purposes in service of the community as a whole.

