News



Fr. Alphonsus Afina, a Nigerian priest who served in the Diocese of Fairbanks Alaska (2017-2024), was abducted June 1, 2025, by Islamist militants in his home country. Aid to the Church in Need International told OSV News July 21 the priest is now free. Afina is pictured in an undated photo. (OSV News/Diocese of Fairbanks)

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Maiduguri, Nigeria — July 22, 2025
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A Nigerian priest kidnapped by Boko Haram in June has been released, OSV News has learned.

Maria Lozano, press contact for Aid to the Church in Need International, told OSV News in a July 21 statement that the organization "thanks God for the release of Fr. Alphonsus Afina."

Lozano added that "this good news has been confirmed to our foundation by local church sources."

Afina, assigned to several parishes across Alaska from September 2017 through 2024, had been abducted June 1 along with an unspecified number of fellow travelers while in Nigeria's Borno state, near the northeastern town of Gwoza.

Bishop John Bogma Bakeni of Maiduguri, Nigeria, had identified the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram as responsible for the kidnapping.

Lozano said that Afina "is already on his way back to be reunited with his community," and that Aid to the Church in Need expected he "will soon return to his parish."

"We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has prayed for him (Afina) and for the Church in Nigeria," said Lozano. "Your prayers have brought strength and hope during this difficult time."

Previously, in a July 16 email to OSV News, Fr. Robert Fath, vicar general and vocation director of the Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska, said that his diocese had "received news through unofficial channels that Fr. Alphonsus is still being held in captivity but is alive.

"He is recovering from wounds on his legs which were the result of being bound very tightly when he was captured," said Fath at the time. "He was allowed to speak to his diocese via phone once again to confirm he is still alive."

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The Pontifical Mission Societies of Nigeria also previously told OSV News that Afina's diocese has asked the people of God to pray a novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help for his release.

Bakeni told The Associated Press June 8 that Afina had been traveling from the city of Mubi, his current pastoral assignment, to Maiduguri for a workshop. At a military checkpoint, his convoy was ambushed by armed men, with a rocket-propelled grenade striking one of the vehicles, killing one and wounding others.

The bishop said it was not clear if Afina was the intended target of the attack.

In June, Bishop Steven Maekawa of Fairbanks called for prayer, celebrating a Mass for Afina at Sacred Heart Cathedral, and writing a letter June 5 to the faithful. He referenced the Gospel account of the paralyzed man carried by friends through the roof of a house to obtain healing from Jesus Christ (Mk 2:1-12).

"We are a powerful people," said the bishop. "Much like the men who make a hole in the roof to lower their friend through it to bring him to Jesus, we are able to bring those in need to our Lord Jesus with our prayers. Without the Lord we can do nothing. Great things can be accomplished by appealing to the love of God."

A recent report from Fides Agency, the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, found that since 2015, 145 priests were abducted in Nigeria, with 11 killed

and 4 still missing as of March.

"Please continue to hold him (Afina) in your prayers," Lozano said.