



Office of the President

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Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles
President

September 3, 2020

Your Eminence/Excellency:

The traditional storm season has only just begun and already we have witnessed the devastating impact of Hurricane Laura and the California wildfires. Thousands of homes, businesses, and churches have been severely damaged or destroyed, and the impacts will be long-lasting. Please find attached a letter to all bishops from Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, by which the Bishop conveys the dire nature of the situation in the aftermath of the hurricane.

We offer our prayers to families who have lost loved ones, homes, and businesses. Archbishop Etienne, the Chairman of our Committee on National Collections, has been in touch with several bishops to learn about their situations and to offer our prayers and our desire to be of assistance in this time of need.

It is reasonable to expect an increasing number of natural disasters. As we often do in these situations, I suggest we take up a voluntary special collection for the humanitarian, long-term recovery, and Church needs arising from these calamities. I ask that we make a special appeal to support the USCCB Bishops Emergency Disaster Fund and that we each take up the collection as soon as possible so that those most in need can receive assistance quickly. The annual collection for The Catholic University of America is scheduled in many dioceses the first or second weekend in September, and so I recommend that the special collection be taken up on the nearest weekend that does not conflict with any local CUA appeal.

The funds collected in this special appeal will become part of the Bishops Emergency Disaster Fund and will be used to support the efforts of Catholic Charities USA and/or Catholic Relief Services, the official relief agencies of the U.S. Catholic Church, as they and their local agencies respond to immediate emergency needs for such necessities as water, food, shelter, and medical care, and aid in long-term rebuilding and recovery efforts; and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for pastoral and reconstruction needs of the Church. Funds will be used in response to Hurricane Laura and any other disasters that occur and will be distributed where they are most needed. However, if such purpose(s) become unnecessary, impractical or impossible to fill, USCCB may use such contributions for other emergency disaster relief where it is most needed as determined by the Committee on National Collections using its emergency response protocol.

I recognize that parish and diocesan activities have been impacted severely by COVID-19 and that the local capacity for fund-raising this year may be more challenging than with past emergency collections. However, I know the generosity of our people and their deep care for those in need. I trust that you will find the best way of making these needs known to your people and I have confidence in their prayerful consideration and response.

Fraternally yours in our Lord,

+ José H. Gomez

Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

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Office of the Bishop

September 3, 2020
St. Gregory the Great

Dear Brother Bishops,

A week has passed since Hurricane Laura devastated our diocese, including serious damage to sister dioceses in the region. The Diocese of Lake Charles suffered a head-on collision with the storm, for the eye passed directly over us in Lake Charles.

My house is only about 30 miles north of the coast. In the end, for us who live inland, the wind left not a dwelling, business, or structure undamaged. Utility poles were down, debris littered the streets, and trees like fallen leaves covered lawns and drove through roofs like cleavers. Electricity is out, and the authorities tell us it will not be restored for two to four weeks or more. There is no internet and no telephone. Only cell phones work—sometimes. Much of the diocese is without water service. For the places that do have running water, it's unreliable and non-potable. The city has a mandated curfew. At present about fifteen priests have no residence. We would hope to house them in not-so-damaged rectories and at our retreat center once a generator is installed.

The generosity and kindness of neighboring dioceses have been so encouraging. Archbishop Gregory Aymond, our Metropolitan, has been particularly solicitous. Across the nation we have received offers to help. Our Catholic Charities is in full operation. Their building, one that we purchased and completely redesigned in the years following Hurricane Rita, sustained very little damage; yet, across the street far more substantial warehouses and businesses were destroyed. Truly God is good to His people! To all of you who have called and reached out, we are very, very grateful.

The parishes on the coast were ravaged. I have begun my visits to them. The storm destroyed the facilities of at least three parishes. Four other coastal parishes were severely damaged. We are still conducting our assessment of these churches.

However, the damage was not restricted to the coast. Roofs of inland churches, religious education buildings, schools, and rectories were ripped off. Just today we learned that the roof of the Cathedral will require extensive repair and perhaps replacement. Our only Catholic High School is partially destroyed. One pastor, whose parish facilities are particularly large, said the entire brick wall on one side of the rectory collapsed. His parochial school cannot reopen because of extensive damage. The pastor is now sleeping in a makeshift travel trailer. The elderly, retired priest living with him was evacuated to Texas. The remaining priests of the parish will be offered residence in a wing of our retreat center. They will join other priests whose rectories were destroyed.

I could describe more, but the situation is dire. We have organized a recovery operation within the Diocese to deal with repairs and building, insurance claims and immediate needs. We have established a diocesan fund for hurricane relief and rebuilding, and I have appointed a team to manage our recovery. Details of our efforts, are currently on our website, which can be found at <http://www.lcdiocese.org>. Photographs of the chancery, churches, and various sites can be seen at <http://www.lcdiocese.org/3-news/2984-hurricane-laura-photo-gallery>

As you know, insurance deductibles are high and government assistance is complex. The rehabilitation of the Diocese will take years to accomplish. This is the third catastrophic hurricane for us in fifteen years. Although no two storms are alike, to a greater or lesser degree, all is *déjà-vu* with the variation this time of more extensive wind damage.

Thank you for your prayers. Above all, please know of our gratitude for your concern and of our prayers for your intentions, as I remain

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glen John Provost", with a decorative flourish at the end.

✠Glen John Provost
Bishop of Lake Charles