News
EarthBeat
The Los Angeles River in Studio City, Calif., Feb. 5, 2024, is pictured during heavy rains. One

The Los Angeles River in Studio City, Calif., Feb. 5, 2024, is pictured during heavy rains. One of the wettest storms in Southern California history unleashed at least 475 mudslides in the Los Angeles area after dumping more than half the amount of rainfall the city typically gets in a season in just two days, and officials warned Feb. 6 that the threat was not over yet. (OSV News/Reuters/Aude Guerrucci)

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Record-breaking storms in Southern California have damaged several Catholic schools and church properties, while forcing one archdiocese to reschedule its rite of election for catechumens.

The region has been battered for several days by consecutive atmospheric rivers, long columns of water vapor in the atmosphere capable of dumping large amounts of rain or snow upon making landfall.

As of Feb. 6, rain totals in some areas exceeded 12 inches over a four-day period. Other locations received anywhere from just under 5.5 to more than 9 inches during

the same span, according to the National Weather Service. Downtown Los Angeles notched close to 8.7 inches of rain in just three days, the second-highest amount recorded there since 1877.

The rain has so far resulted in at least nine deaths, as well as flooding, mudslides, downed trees, power outages and building damage.

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Yannina Diaz, interim director of media relations for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, told OSV News in an email that the archdiocese "has received reports from around 15 locations of storm damage that is currently being assessed.

"Most of the damage is related to roof or window leaks," Diaz said. "There was a report of a downed tree hitting a building without any injuries to anyone. It may take several weeks to assess the extent of the damage and cost of repairs."

The storms forced the archdiocese to reschedule until Feb. 25 several celebrations of the rite of election, when the names of those seeking to enter the Catholic Church are enrolled for baptism at the Easter Vigil.

Meanwhile, Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, which serves Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, has created a disaster relief fund "that will be used to help families and individuals who are suffering from the effects of the storm," Alexandria Arnold, the agency's chief development and communications officer, told OSV News.

First responders inspect a mudslide in Studio City, Calif., Feb. 5, 2024, following heavy rains a

First responders inspect a mudslide in Studio City, Calif., Feb. 5, 2024, following heavy rains and flooding. (OSV News/Reuters/Aude Guerrucci)

"Catholic Charities USA is sending additional funding for disaster relief," she noted.

For one Catholic school, the storms have been an exercise in resilience.

Students at St. John of the Cross School in Lemon Grove were forced to temporarily relocate to the former St. Michael Academy in San Diego, after a Jan. 22 storm inflicted major damage at the St. John campus and at another nine Catholic parishes and schools, as well as a women's shelter operated by Catholic Charities of the

Diocese of San Diego.

St. John of the Cross principal Greg Krumm said the Jan. 22 storm produced "a flash flood like we've never had before" that in a matter of minutes "inundated the entire school — every single classroom, every single office space."

Seventh-grade teacher Amanda Hodges told The Southern Cross, San Diego's diocesan newspaper, that it was a "very intense" situation.

St. John of the Cross School students in Lemon Grove, Calif., move boxes into St. Michael Aca

St. John of the Cross School students in Lemon Grove, Calif., move boxes into St. Michael Academy in San Diego Feb. 5, 2024, after their campus sustained severe flooding in a historic rainstorm Jan. 22. St. Michael Academy closed three years ago. (OSV News/The Southern Cross/Andy Hayt)

"I think it started raining at 10:30 in the morning and by 10:45, we had water almost across my entire classroom. ... By the end of it, I think it was like almost 2 inches of water inside the classroom," Hodges said, adding that she couldn't open the door without letting in more water.

The school was evacuated and cleanup efforts began, with classes resuming at St. Michael Feb. 5 marked by an upbeat welcome celebration and address from Krumm.

After settling in, another atmospheric river began pounding the area — but the region's Catholic community has rallied in solidarity with affected parishes and schools.

Following the initial flood, Krumm said that support "just shows how close-knit we are and how willing we are to help each other out."