News
EarthBeat
A historic Franciscan Baroque monastery is seen flooded Sept. 15, 2024, in Klodzko, Poland, a

A historic Franciscan Baroque monastery is seen flooded Sept. 15, 2024, in Klodzko, Poland, as southwestern Poland suffered disastrous floods after torrential rains caused by Storm Boris. On the outside, the walls of the property were damaged, and inside, water flooded pews, altar, causing damage estimated at $3.5 million. (OSV News photo/courtesy Franciscans in Klodzko)

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Krakow, Poland — September 16, 2024
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Poland's government is preparing a decree of a state of natural disaster as the southwestern part of the country was severely flooded by torrential rains caused by Storm Boris.

Throughout the weekend of Sept. 14-15, the storm continued to wreak havoc across Central and Eastern Europe.

One person drowned in Poland, a firefighter died during a flood rescue in Austria, five people died in Romania and several remain unaccounted for in the Czech Republic. As of Sept. 16, 11 people were confirmed dead in the affected regions.

"I want to express our sympathy to those who have experienced this great drama, but at the same time assure them that they are not left alone," Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk, president of the Polish bishops' conference, said in a Sept. 16 statement as thousands of people were evacuated from the flood-affected region of the country.

"We are praying for them, supporting them spiritually, but at the same time we also want to support them materially. Caritas Poland, which coordinates aid on behalf of the entire Church in Poland, has already begun to provide it," Wojda noted.

"Water, after heavy rains, flooded many houses, schools, kindergartens, and hospitals. Many homes and public buildings have been destroyed, and the entire road infrastructure in that area has been badly damaged," the archbishop said.

A 17th-century Franciscan monastery in Klodzko, seat of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, was dramatically affected by the flood.

"The whole main church was flooded," Fr. Ignacy Szczytowski, guardian of the monastery, told OSV News.

"We're located right at the curve of the Nysa Klodzka River. There were no chances that with this amount of water we would manage to stop it from coming," he said.

A general view taken by drone shows a flooded area by Nysa Klodzka River in Nysa, Poland S

A general view taken by drone shows a flooded area by Nysa Klodzka River in Nysa, Poland Sept. 16, 2024. (OSV News photo/Kacper Pempel, Reuters)

On Sept. 15 the monastery's Facebook page showed the main church of the historic religious complex deep under water, with pews floating in the muddy waters inside the church.

"The historic main altar is flooded. Thanks to our parishioners, who tried to save as much as they could, along with our brothers, many treasures were carried into the upper parts of the monastery," Szczytowski said, adding that his brothers decided not to be evacuated from the monastery, and they have enough food supplies.

"Now the water has lowered down, our basement is still completely flooded, and on the ground floor we have about 15 inches of mud. It really looks dramatic out there,"

Szczytowski said Sept. 16, worried that it was still raining in Klodzko and water from other parts of the region was coming down to picturesque towns of the Sudety Mountains.

Several towns in southwestern Poland's Dolnoslaskie region were severely affected by the floods, with the town of Glucholazy completely cut off.

Caritas Poland immediately dedicated $50,000 for emergency help to those affected and asked for donations as "dehumidifiers, drinking water, generators, shovels, wheelbarrows, rubber boots, cloths, hygiene items, food with a long shelf life," were urgently needed, Catholic Church's charity organization said in a Sept. 15 statement.

The Polish branch of the Order of Malta immediately sent medical rescue teams to help with the rescue mission.

"The Malta Medical Service branches in Czechowice Dziedzice, Nysa and other cities in southern Poland, are operating at full capacity, supporting rescue and medical operations, saving the health, lives and property of citizens," the Order of Malta Poland said in a Sept. 15 statement, signed by President Jacek Tarnowski.

Tarnowski appealed for help "that will allow us to respond immediately and effectively," adding that "any financial support now is invaluable."

The flooding, which has ravaged numerous areas, "continues to get worse," Tarnowski said on behalf of the order.

The floods hit the same area where in July 1997 the so-called "flood of the millennium" killed 114 people in Poland, Czech Republic and Germany. The 2024 disaster brought back the worst fears and memories for Szczytowski.

"Again, like in 1997, we lost the wall around the monastery, and we lacked five steps for the water to reach the first floor of the monastery," he said. "It took us two years to renovate the monastery after the 1997 disaster. Only a month ago I tried to get funds to renovate the main altar that really never was properly renovated after the 'flood of the millennium,'" he said.

Szczytowski said the losses at the monastery are roughly $3.5 million.

In the midst of tragedy, he is however hopeful.

"So many people, lay and priests, reached out to me already about how they could help," Szczytowski told OSV News.

The monastery was built between 1678 and 1732 and is considered a baroque pearl of the region. "We managed to save a baroque statue of Our Lady," Szczytowski said.

"So many parishioners dedicated their help with so much commitment to save the place," he said. "Our monastery is a place where people gather, where everyone stops by for prayer, confession, Mass."

"Let's pray for those affected," he added. "It's a sign of Christian charity."

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