News
EarthBeat



A signal light goes green on the Pacific Coast Highway during a weather-driven windstorm in Los Angeles Jan. 7, 2025, that fueled ferocious wildfires. (OSV News/Reuters/Daniel Cole)



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The photo on the website of Corpus Christi Church told the story. A shell of a building silhouetted against a fiery, smoky sky with the message, "I have no words. Our beautiful church in Pacific Palisades, as of this morning."

The uncontrolled fires that have consumed more than 1,000 homes and buildings in the Palisades, Malibu and other Los Angeles neighborhoods and left at least two people dead also have devastated Catholic communities, especially Corpus Christi Church and school, said Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson, pastor of nearby St. Monica's Catholic Community in Santa Monica.

"The whole community is devastated, in Pacific Palisades, because there's — so much of it has been wiped away," Torgerson told the National Catholic Reporter on Jan. 8.

Clerics at Corpus Christi could not immediately be reached. St. Monica's was spared damage and on Wednesday evening welcomed evacuees fleeing the Palisades Fire, offering water, snacks, and a mustering point to re-group and assistance finding services.

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Angelus News, the Los Angeles archdiocese's news site, reported that at least 65 Catholic schools were closed Wednesday morning as a result of several fires burning in the LA-area, including a fire in Altadena and another in the northern San Fernando Valley.

Speaking before the photo was posted on Corpus Christi's parish website, Torgerson said he had heard the church and school were both damaged if not destroyed. "You lose your church, you lose a portion of your school, that's tragic," he said.

The school posted on its website a handheld video of a television news report that also spoke of the church building being a total loss.

Torgerson, the pastor of St. Monica parish for more than 25 years, said he has spent hours on the phone with fellow clerics and dozens of parishioners trying to

comprehend the still-unfolding disaster, with the fires completely uncontained as of Wednesday morning in Los Angeles.

"I've called both the pastor and the principal of Corpus Christi and spoken to both of them and we stand ready to help them in any way we can with their community or with their school because we're brothers and sisters and we have to connect with each other and support each other right now," Torgerson said. "My best effort at the moment is very initial, because we're just at the very beginning of this and they're just trying to wrap their head around it all."



A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns during a weather-driven windstorm on the west side of Los Angeles Jan. 7, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Ringo Chiu)

Torgerson said he has fielded calls from many of his parishioners. "I've been on the phone all morning talking to people who live in the area and many have lost their homes and are feeling just tragically devastated by it. And so our prayer of support right now is going out to them," he said.

He said Santa Monica gave shelter to one family who included someone who was particularly ill. "We had a little place last night for people to come in and recover a little bit. And one family is staying with us at the moment, just because he's been ill and I wanted to make sure that he was safe and happy. And so we're doing our best to help as best we can. The city is rough."

While Santa Monica was safe as of the time Torgerson spoke to NCR, he noted that "there's an evacuation just above us on Montana or San Vincente, but we're not included in the business this moment, so we're staying for now."

A native of Los Angeles and a priest since 1965, Torgerson said he has spoken to Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, who "has been very caring, and has called several times" and has also checked in with the Corpus Christi pastor.

He said it is too soon for specific information on fundraising and other efforts. "We just are at the beginning stages. … It's a terrible state." Torgerson said Santa Monica parish is "praying for those poor folks and offering whatever hospitality and whatever care and whatever support they need."



People evacuate as smoke rises from a wildfire burning near Pacific Palisades on the west side of Los Angeles during a weather-driven windstorm in Los Angeles Jan. 7, 2025. Wildfires tore across the Los Angeles area with devastating force Jan. 8 after setting off a desperate escape for residents from burning homes through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke. (OSV News/Reuters/Daniel Cole)