News
EarthBeat



Destroyed structures are seen in Malibu, Calif., Jan. 8, 2025, as the Palisades Fire burns during a windstorm on the west side of Los Angeles. Firefighters battled early Jan. 9 to control a series of major fires in the Los Angeles area that have killed five people, ravaged communities from the Pacific Coast to Pasadena and sent thousands of people frantically fleeing their homes. (OSV News/Ringo Chiu, Reuters)

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Los Angeles — January 10, 2025
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As deadly wildfires ravage Los Angeles, Catholics are mobilizing to help those impacted.

Catholic Charities USA — the official domestic relief agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S. and a member of Caritas Internationalis, the church's global network of humanitarian organizations — is now accepting donations to its Los Angeles Wildfire Relief initiative, which can be accessed through the agency's website at catholiccharitiesusa.org.

"As usual, 100% of the funds raised go directly to our local agencies in the affected areas who are offering emergency and long-term relief to those who have been displaced or are suffering as a result of the wildfires," Kevin Brennan, CCUSA's vice president for media relations and executive communications, told OSV News in a Jan. 9 email.

At least five people have died and more than 137,000 people have been evacuated amid at least five named wildfires. The two largest files, the Palisades and Eaton fires, together encompass more than 27,000 acres and remained uncontained as of midday Jan. 9.

Thousands of homes and other structures — including a number of churches, synagogues and other houses of worship — have been destroyed. At least 300,000 properties remain without power.

The blazes, which broke out Jan. 7, have been fueled by powerful Santa Ana winds reaching more than 60 mph, as well as extremely dry conditions that have rendered vegetation quick to burn.

"Our local agency staff are focusing on the safety of their communities and cooperating with emergency management guidance," Brennan told OSV News. "As soon as it's safe to do so, they'll start assessing the damage. Of course, CCUSA stands ready and is preparing to assist with teams of people and financial support."

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has also created a dedicated relief fund in response to the fires, which the archdiocese said have "deeply affected our schools, parishes, and beloved community members.

"In times of trial, our faith calls us to come together in solidarity to provide hope and healing for those who are struggling," said the archdiocese on the fund's website, which can be accessed at https://lacatholics.org/california-fires.

"Our schools and parishes have always been cornerstones of education, faith, and togetherness. Now, they and countless families in our community need your help to recover and rebuild," said the archdiocese. "Our community is resilient, but together, we can make the road to recovery shorter and brighter. Let us come together to restore hope and offer a helping hand to our neighbors in their time of need."

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Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles has urged prayers for all those affected, saying, "My heart goes out to our neighbors who have lost their homes and livelihoods. Let's pray for them and let's pray for our firefighters and first responders."

The archbishop will preside at three Masses this week for first responders and wildfire victims, with two liturgies taking place Jan. 9, one at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles and one at Mission San Gabriel; a third is to be celebrated Jan. 10 at Incarnation Church in Glendale, California. A media advisory issued by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles noted that "locations are subject to change due to the movement of the fires and possible evacuation orders."

Parishes in the archdiocese have opened their doors to those displaced by the wildfires.

According to Angelus, the archdiocesan media outlet, St. Monica Catholic Church in Santa Monica welcomed evacuees, providing snacks, rest facilities and device charging.

"We have dozens and dozens of parishioners and school families who have lost everything," said St. Monica parish life director Merrick Siebenaler.

However, by the morning of Jan. 8, the parish campus closed after fire officials designated it as part of a fire "warning zone."

Pastor Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson hosted one older couple at the parish rectory, and prayed with another family who had lost their home to the wildfires.

Los Angeles city officials opened a shelter at Sacred Heart Church in Los Angeles, with members of the local St. Vincent de Paul Society handing out supplies, among them children's clothing and diapers, to displaced persons.

"We're here to help out," Sacred Heart pastor Father Tesfaldet Asghedom told Angelus.