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Pope Francis gives his blessing to people gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for the recitation of the Angelus prayer Jan. 12, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

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"I am praying for all of you," Pope Francis said, using his televised Sunday Angelus address to speak directly to the people impacted by the wildfires in Southern California.

"I am close to the residents of Los Angeles County, California, where devastating fires have broken out in recent days," the pope told thousands of people gathered in St. Peter's Square Jan. 12 to pray the Angelus with him.

In a telegram released by the Vatican the previous day, Francis also assured the people of Los Angeles of his prayers as the fires continued to cause death and destruction.

"Entrusting the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of almighty God, His Holiness sends heartfelt condolences to those who mourn their loss," said a telegram sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, to Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles.

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The fires, fueled by dry conditions and warm winds, began Jan. 7. As of 6 p.m. local time Jan. 11, the Los Angeles County medical examiner's office said 16 people had been confirmed dead. More than 150,000 people were ordered to evacuate their homes and thousands of structures, including houses and churches, have been destroyed.

The telegram to Gomez, said, "Saddened by the loss of life and the widespread destruction caused by the fires near Los Angeles, His Holiness Pope Francis assures you and the communities affected by this tragedy of his spiritual closeness."

"He likewise prays for the relief efforts of the emergency services personnel and imparts his blessing to all as a pledge of consolation and strength in the Lord," it

said.