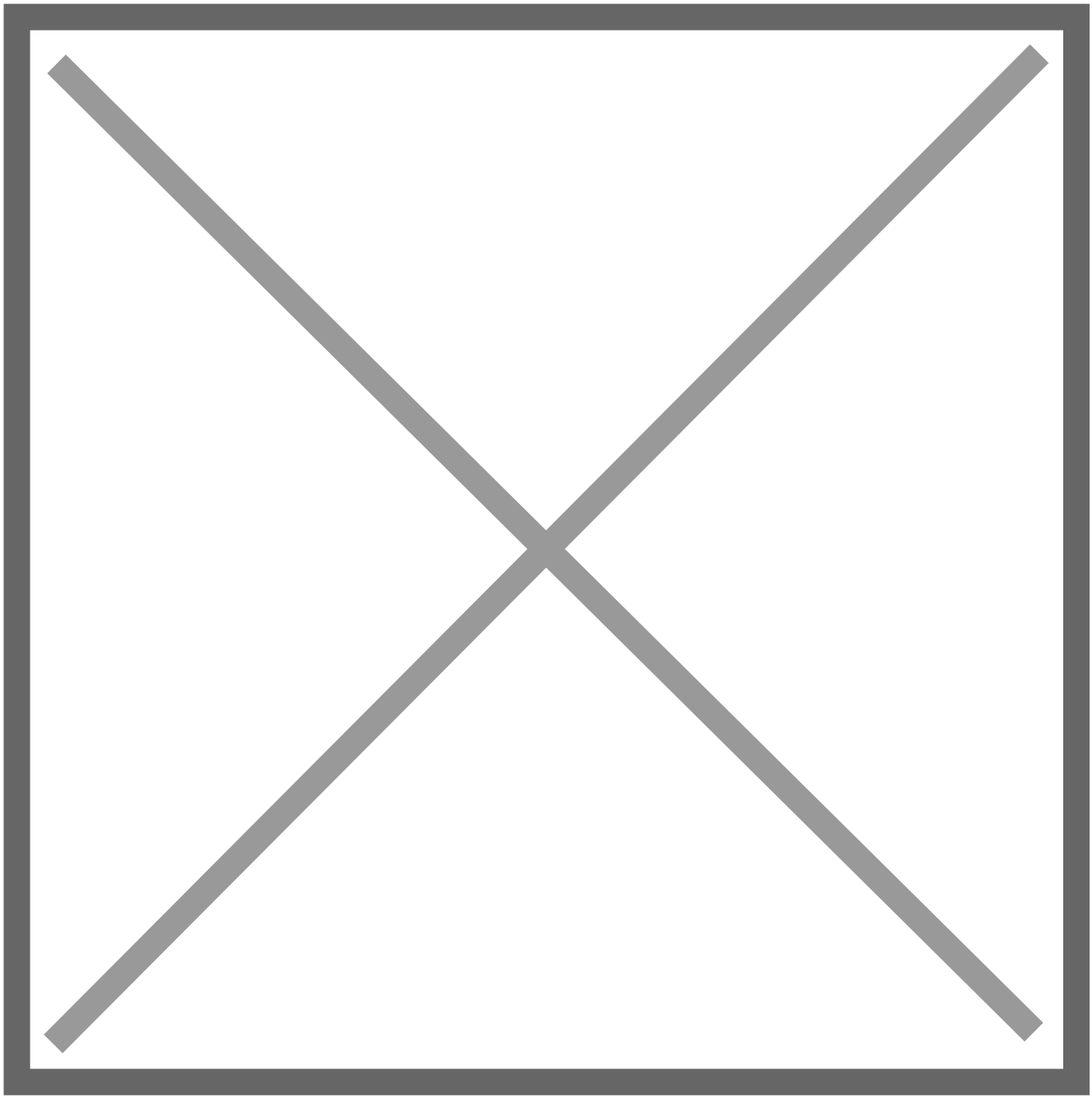


Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, Neb., gives the homily at Mass July 13, 2022, in the Crypt Church at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. On March 16, 2026, Conley asked for prayers as wildfires ravaged more than 700,000 acres in central and western Nebraska. (OSV News/Tyler Orsburn)

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Lincoln, Neb. — March 18, 2026
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A Nebraska bishop is calling for prayer as that state battles what are believed to be the worst wildfires in its recorded history, which have killed at least one person.

"Please join me in praying for all those who are dealing with the dangerous wildfires in Nebraska right now," said Bishop James Conley of Lincoln in a March 16 X post.

Four major fires have so far ravaged more than 700,000 acres in central and western Nebraska, with officials noting one of them, the Morrill Fire, spans close to 573,000 acres and alone ranks as Nebraska's largest wildfire ever. The blaze, in which one person died, was only 18% contained as of March 17, according to local media reports.

"Pray for the woman who lost her life and her family and friends," wrote Conley in his post.

The Cottonwood Fire, which has seared more than 131,000 acres, was at 40% containment as of late afternoon March 17, with a third blaze, the Road 203 fire, burning almost 36,000 acres while only 36% contained.

Responders have succeeded in containing 60% of the Anderson Bridge Fire, which has torn through 17,400 acres.

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen declared a state of emergency March 13, issuing a statewide ban on burning through March 27 to prevent the fires from further spreading.

On March 14, Pillen surveyed the fire damage by air, and during a press conference, he urged residents to obey local evacuation orders — to pray.

"I think it's important that all Nebraskans pray," he said. "The circumstances have not changed. Yesterday was one of the toughest days, and through the night, that we've probably ever experienced in our state."

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With the fires significantly impacting the state's livestock industry, Pillen repeated that call March 16 as he signed an executive order for assistance with agricultural supplies.

"Please continue to pray for our firefighters on the frontline, the families whose lives are being upturned, and the producers who are working around the clock to protect their operations and livestock," said Pillen in a statement.

In his X post, Conley also implored prayers for rescue and response teams, noting that while traveling through the state to administer the sacrament of confirmation, he had stayed at a North Platte hotel where "about half" of the rooms were filled by firefighters and first responders.

"Pray for their safety and the safety of those whose homes and property are being threatened," said Conley.

He noted that while in western and central Nebraska for March 14-15 confirmation liturgies, he "had to take back roads at times navigating some of the fires."

"We prayed for all the people being affected by the fires and all the firefighters at all four Masses over the weekend," said Conley.

"Pray that God's hand may calm the winds and bring much-needed moisture to help with the fight," he said. "We ask the Lord to take control of the fires that are out of control and bring about a quick and safe resolution for all."

Concluding his X post, Conley wrote, "Jesus, we trust in you!"