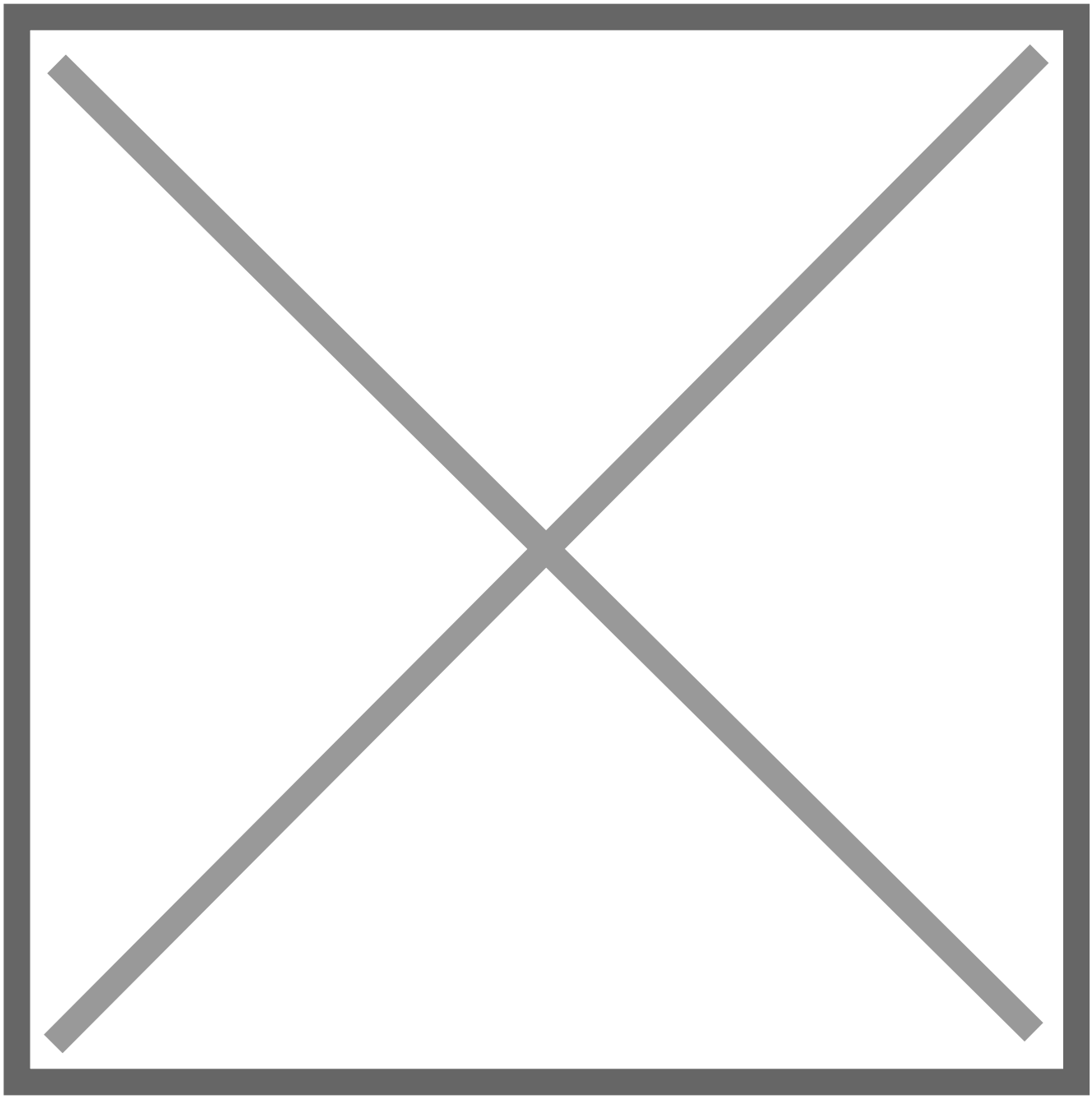


A priest gives a blessing as he stands amid rubble at the site of a collapsed building in La Guaira, Venezuela, July 1, 2026, in the aftermath of earthquakes. Two catastrophic earthquakes hit Venezuela in quick succession June 24, leaving at least 3,500 dead, which experts say is a major undercount. (OSV News/Reuters/Adriano Machado)

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Catholic leaders and organizations in the U.S. continue to aid Venezuela as that nation recovers from two deadly earthquakes that struck seconds apart June 24.

Brittany Wichtendahl, a spokesperson for Catholic Relief Services — the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' official overseas humanitarian and development agency — told OSV News July 8 her agency is "working extremely closely" with its in-country partner Caritas Venezuela.

Both organizations are part of Caritas Internationalis, the universal Catholic Church's global humanitarian network.

Wichtendahl confirmed that a CRS "earthquake response support team is now fully deployed" in Venezuela. "CRS-supported distributions began last week and so far, we've handed out more than 1,800 emergency food kits, 850 family hygiene kits and 400 baby hygiene kits," she said.

In a June 25 statement, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, pointed to the "significant loss of life and severe destruction" resulting from the disaster.

At least 3,500 were killed during the 7.2 and 7.5 quakes, which took place just 39 seconds apart.

"As rescue efforts are underway, I urge the international community to mobilize in support of the Venezuelan people, and to send the necessary humanitarian assistance to alleviate their suffering," said Zaidan, shepherd of the St. Louis-based Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles.

Rescue and recovery efforts have been hampered by existing long-running crises in Venezuela. Home to the world's largest oil deposits, the Latin American nation has been plagued for years by authoritarianism, human rights abuses, endemic corruption and economic collapse.

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In a situation update posted to its website, CRS noted that prior to the two earthquakes, "an estimated 7.9 million people were already in need of assistance due to years of economic crisis, food insecurity and weakened public services."

In her remarks to OSV July 8, Wichtendahl said CRS has to date sent more than 1,600 tarpaulins for shelter support, while already developing "plans for long-term recovery."

So far, "Caritas Venezuela has handed out 5,000 emergency food kits, 3,000 hygiene kits, more than 120,000 liters of safe water and more than 73,000 medical supplies and medicine," she said.

Caritas Venezuela has supplied "more than 870 tools" for search and rescue teams, she added.

As they dig through the rubble, often with bare hands, many Venezuelans are now expressing anger at Venezuelan leader Delcy Rodríguez. The former vice president ascended to power following the U.S.'s January capture of then-leader President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, now in New York facing trial for narcoterrorism and other federal charges.

In his message, Zaidan thanked the U.S. government for its "partnership in responding to this natural disaster."

On June 29, the State Department announced an increase in its funding for post-quake humanitarian needs, bringing the total to "more than $300 million," according to an official statement.

Total funding for State Department partner organizations responding to the disaster — including CRS and other faith-based groups — is now at $200 million, said the statement.

CRS has also organized a donation effort through its website, with contributions accepted by phone, mail and multiple online payment platforms, among them Venmo.

Zaidan called upon the faithful to pray for divine assistance in helping Venezuelans.

"Let us all join in prayer that Our Lady of Coromoto, patroness of Venezuela, will comfort and protect her children and that compassionate international assistance will arrive swiftly," he said.