



## HURRICANE LAURA: ONE YEAR LATER Diocese moving forward with hope as it rebuilds from storms

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

A year ago, the Diocese of Lake Charles was getting its first glimpse at the catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Laura on Aug. 27, 2020. Churches, rectories, and schools were destroyed. Nearly one-third of priests were displaced. Even the Chancery is still unusable.

From destruction in Cameron Parish, where the storm made landfall with 150-mph winds, to the devastating impact it had as far inland as Allen and Beauregard parishes, Laura is the strongest hurricane residents of Louisiana have seen in their lifetimes. It is tied with the 1856 "Last Island Hurricane" based on wind speeds.

Within days of the storm, many priests were celebrating weekend Masses, a visible sign of dedication to their vocation. Bishop Glen John Provost, who remained in the Diocese throughout the storm, officiated at the 9:30 a.m. Sunday liturgy on Aug. 30 in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. A week later in Cameron Parish, he celebrated an outdoor Mass at Hackett's Corner on Sept. 6 for recovery workers and survivors of Hurricane Laura in that region.

Three of the coastal parishes — Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron, Sacred Heart of Jesus in Creole, and St. Eugene in Grand Chenier — were destroyed, leaving those parishioners to share the parish hall of St. Mary of the Lake in Big Lake until its own church can be rebuilt.

The Diocese has made successful strides in its recovery efforts since those first few days. Father Ruben J. Buller, Vicar General, who also serves as Chief of Recovery, said the greatest overall progress since Hurricane Laura has been in preparing

for the permanent repairs.

"We had damage at every parish in the Diocese, some more significant than others," said Buller, noting over 500 structures with an estimated \$135 million in total damages. "The good news is that repairs are beginning to be made. Most, if not all our priests, are living in a stable condition at this point. Either their rectory has been repaired enough or they have moved to another location. For those structures where the outside is in good shape, we just need to finish the roofs."

Christ the King Catholic Church in Lake Charles and St. Pius X Catholic Church in Ragley, have started meeting with the Baton Rouge-based firm selected to design their churches. Early on, Christ the King was sharing space at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish until a temporary building could be set up, just in time for Christmas Eve Mass.

Three local architecture firms have been selected to design new schools: St. Louis Catholic High School and St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic School, both in Lake Charles; and Our Lady's School in Sulphur.

"Both temporary campuses at St. Louis and St. Margaret are operational, and the temporary campus at Our Lady's School is expected to be ready for the start of the new school year," Buller said. "We received our first FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) grant totaling more than \$2 million as reimbursement for the cost of temporary classrooms at St. Louis High School. It's a beginning."

Viewing the recovery through the lens of "One Diocese, One Church," Father Buller said that one success in any area is a success overall.

"We celebrated when our temporary schools opened. We celebrated when Christ the King was able to have Mass again on their campus, and we celebrate now that we have received our first grant,"

he said. "Even though it might not be a grant for one of the church parishes, it is still cause for celebration."

If not for a second hurricane, an ice storm, and historic flooding within the span of nine months after Laura, Father Buller said the Diocese would be further along.

"Every time we have a disaster of this nature, we are set back anywhere from two weeks to two months because we have to do all the remediation work to make sure the building is still salvageable. Everything else is put on hold," he said.

Four federally declared weather disasters are just part of the challenges Father Buller and the recovery team have faced in their task of rebuilding an entire diocese spanning five civil parishes.

"A big challenge has been dealing with discouragement, not only my own, but that of pastors as well as parishioners who wish we were further along with repairs. I think we all share that same feeling," said Buller. "The important thing is not to lose hope. We are moving forward."

### Catholic Schools

Of the six Catholic schools in the Diocese, the only one that opened immediately after Laura was Our Lady Immaculate in Jennings. St. Louis High School was the first to have its temporary classrooms in place less than two weeks after Hurricane Delta hit on Oct. 9. For several months, upper grades at St. Margaret of Scotland used the third floor of Immaculate Conception Cathedral School, while the lower grades remained on the original St. Margaret site until the temporary campus was installed. Our Lady's School in Sulphur utilized a portion of its main building, and Our Lady Queen of Heaven students attended on its original campus.

Superintendent Kimberlee Gazzolo sees the tireless efforts of so many as one of the biggest accomplishments



Sister Miriam MacLean, RSM, director of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, proclaims one of the readings for a special Mass officiated by Bishop Provost at Hackett's Corner in Cameron Parish on Sept. 6, 2020. Bishop Provost celebrated the Mass for recovery workers and hurricane survivors in the coastal parish. It was during this Mass that His Excellency recited a prayer he composed for the recovery of the Diocese of Lake Charles in the wake of Hurricane Laura.

## Prayer for the Recovery of the Diocese of Lake Charles after Hurricane Laura

Heavenly Father, Who willed that the fallen hut of David be rebuilt; that Your people return from exile to repopulate their lands, rebuild Jerusalem and restore the Temple; that Your Son, Jesus Christ, would be the new temple and that He would build a new Jerusalem, firmly set on the twelve apostles of the Lamb; look, Gracious Creator, upon our devastation now in the Diocese of Lake Charles and along the coast; rouse up in the hearts of many good and faithful workers the courage, perseverance, and fortitude to bring Your task to a successful completion, where what is recovered will give Your name glory and be protected from the onslaught of the Devil; put to flight lethargy of spirit and fortify our wills so that the good works of Your faithful people will be seen as fulfilling Your work; grant us understanding, God of all light and reason, so that we will comprehend Your ways and see in every suffering and tribulation an occasion to embrace Your will and grow in love for You. Grant, loving Father, through that same Jesus Christ, our Lord, all these prayers by the intercession of Our Lady Star of the Sea, You, who live and reign in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The Most Reverend Glen John Provost  
Bishop of Lake Charles  
On the occasion of Hurricane Laura  
August 27, 2020

during the past school year.

"Our school administrators, teachers, and staff worked endlessly to get back into school," Gazzolo said. "Even prior to getting back on campuses, our teachers were providing virtual instruction to students and working on academic gains."

The impact of two back-to-back hurricanes did not come without challenges for a school system faced with structural damages on several campuses.

"Many of our families were displaced, and our school personnel worked hard to make sure we stayed connected and were back into the classrooms as quickly as possible," said Gazzolo. "The Office of Catholic Schools is very grateful for the anonymous donation which established the Bishop's Hurricanes Relief Tuition Fund. Over \$100,000 in grants has been provided directly to families — who experienced damages from the hurricanes — to assist with tuition costs for the 2021-2022 school year."

The overwhelming devastation left by Hurricane Laura was a lot to digest in those first few days, but Gazzolo said she is thankful for how quickly everyone gathered to help assess and clean up damages.

"I am most grateful for the sense of community that we experienced right after the storms and continue to experience a year later," she said.

As Catholic schools begin the 2021-2022 school year in the midst of hurricane recovery, the superintendent's focus is on academics and rebuilding.

"Our teachers will be focused on assessing our students, meeting them where they are, and moving them forward to meet grade-level standards," Gazzolo said. "Our school leadership teams are also focused on continuing the repairs of our building sites. For three of those sites, the rebuilding is significant,

and we will be focused on those operations and plans to get back to permanent structures."

### Saint Charles Center

Deacon Brian Soileau had only been director at both Saint Charles Center and Camp Karol in Moss Bluff less than two months when Hurricane Laura hit. The devastation from the storm's intensity quickly shifted Soileau's focus from planning tranquil retreats to helping coordinate disaster response overnight.

Now, on the one-year anniversary, Saint Charles Center is hosting a weekend retreat, "Heroes and Heroines," led by Father Andrew DeRouen. He was one of several priests who found refuge at Tabor Retreat House for five months after being displaced from their rectories.

According to Deacon Soileau, Saint Charles Center is now 95 percent complete with reconstruction, and Camp Karol is at 100 percent. He is surprised by those numbers considering what he faced on Aug. 27 last year.

"When I arrived at the entrance of Saint Charles Center on the afternoon of the storm, my heart sank," Soileau said as he recalled having to park his truck on the side of Highway 378 because the driveway was blocked with so many trees. "If you would have asked me where we would be a year after the storm, I would have told you we are still going to be shut down."

Pivoting into survival mode is second nature for Soileau after serving many years in the prison system, most of it employed at Allen Correctional Center. He said the first thing that was obvious to him and what would need immediate attention was the widespread destruction to the property.

"Over the years, we have people tell us that the minute they drive through the gate at Saint Charles Center, they feel peace," Soileau said of

the nearly 26-year-old site for spiritual renewal. "Part of that are the surroundings, the trees, the wildlife, all those things that have been here for so many years. We lost one of the most beautiful nature trails behind the Assumption Chapel. We will never get that back."

The loss of the landscape's beauty was a critical concern for Soileau. For a retreat center, he said the landscape and look of the place sets the mood for retreatants.

"We are reconfiguring a lot of the grounds around the property because of so many downed trees," he said. "The Way of the Cross, for example, will have a different route with some added features so that when people come back, there may be some things that are no longer here that they are going to miss, but we are adding some things that will give them that experience they are looking for. We are also making new gardens and creating new spaces to help people enjoy their retreat experience."

Both retreat locations proved valuable for the Diocese to continue its ongoing operations with the Chancery left uninhabitable for the unforeseen future. Katharine Drexel Conference Center serves as the temporary Fiscal office, while the Tribunal staff carried out its work at Camp Karol until relocating to Our Lady Queen of Heaven a few months ago.

Despite the ongoing challenges forced upon him by Hurricane Laura, Soileau said he is thankful for the opportunity to become a stronger director.

"Right out of the gate, I was faced with the worst-case scenario anyone could be given as a director," he said. "At this stage of the game, I feel like if we ever get back to normal, surely I can handle normal with more confidence than ever after all of this chaos." (See HURRICANE, next page)



Bishop Glen John Provost operates a forklift at Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana on Aug. 28, 2020, to help unload a special delivery of bottled water donated by the Diocese of Beaumont. Newly installed Bishop David L. Toups from the Beaumont diocese had his own damages to assess but reached out to his neighbors to the east in their time of great need.

## Bishop Provost shares reflections one year into recovery

Just a few hours after the storm, as I surveyed the damages to the Diocese and our churches, not to mention the devastation to the homes and businesses of the people of Southwest Louisiana, I had an overwhelming sense that we were not alone. God was and continues to be present in a remarkable way. I see this in the faith of our people which is undimmed by the darkness of this catastrophe. And, I experience it in the kindness and generosity of so many who are assisting our recovery. While much is left to be done, we have made great progress.

A year ago, September 1st, I appointed a Recovery Team

to lead us through the rebuilding. Father Ruben Buller, as the Chief of Recovery, is doing a splendid job and service to us all in immeasurable ways to coordinate this colossal effort. No one knows just how difficult this is. There are so many others: Ms. Stephanie Rodrigue, the Director of Temporal Goods; Ms. Britney Beale, the Recovery Secretary; Sister Miriam MacLean, RSM, and the staff and workers of Catholic Charities; our dedicated Deans under the direction of Monsignor Daniel Torres — and so many countless others, too numerous to name. I cannot express my gratitude enough.

Across the nation, generous donors and volunteers reached out to us. One anecdote will help describe the Christian vitality we have all experienced during this last year. I visited a church parish in New Orleans that had been exceedingly generous to the Diocese of Lake Charles, not only in funding but also volunteer work. As I expressed our deep appreciation to the pastor in the presence of a few of his parishioners, one of them spoke up and said, "Bishop, we were happy to do it. We cannot forget what the people of your area did for us after Katrina." Experiences like these are reminders to me of God's presence.





**The Very Rev. Edward Richard, M.S., pastor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church in Sulphur, shows off his sleeping quarters after Hurricane Laura kicked him out of the rectory. Father Richard, who also serves as Dean of the West Deanery, converted the tow-behind mini trailer into a camper to use as his temporary home under the rectory carport until initial repairs could be made to the rectory.**

## HURRICANE

continued from previous page

**Catholic Charities**  
Sister Miriam MacLean, RSM, executive director of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, was on the ground running within hours of Laura's landfall, and again the day after Hurricane Delta in October. Spared of any major damage, the non-profit agency has been a lifeline keeping up with the increased needs of the community.

"Catholic Charities was a stable presence before the storms, and we have continued to be a bright spot for people during the long-term recovery," Sister Miriam said. "As we reach this one-year mark, I have been thinking about that immediate response from people coming in from everywhere, people's generosity, both practically and monetarily. The tremendous presence in the community has been a gift."

As destructive as Hurricane Laura was for so many, the storm was a turning point for Catholic Charities to be more effective in its ministry.

"The storm gave us a reason to get out to the five-parish region of Southwest Louisiana and the Diocese of Lake Charles by expanding the services we provide with food distributions," Sister Miriam noted. "In addition to Lake Charles, Big Lake, and Creole (before the hurricane), we added sites in Ragley, Kinder, Elton, Deridder, Jennings, and Vinton. We average assistance to about 3,000 individuals per month with more than 85,000 pounds of food."

In the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes, Catholic Charities distributed approximately 1800 pallets throughout the five-parish area. Keeping things in perspective, one

pallet of food holds anywhere from 800 to 1,100 pounds of food. Prior to the storms, 200 households per month were receiving assistance. That number jumped to 794 households just three months after the hurricane.

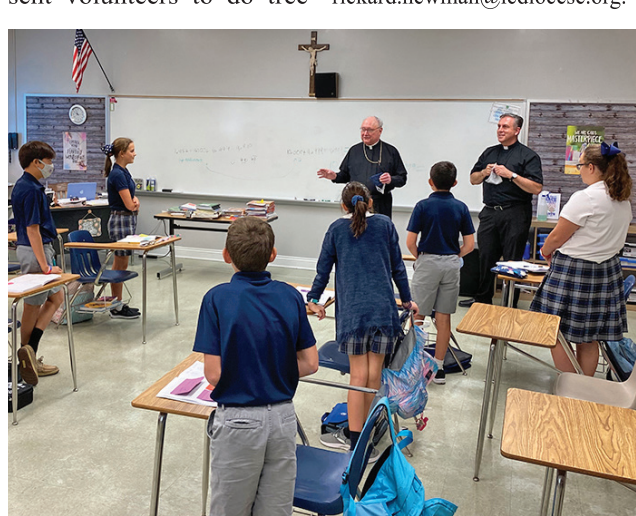
"We are grateful for the many people, churches, and businesses who have helped us, including Second Harvest Food Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Louisiana, Cheniere Foundation, Phillips 66, CenterPoint Energy, Hancock Whitney Bank, Lyondell-Basell, Stine, and Venture Global," said Sister Miriam. "Seeing all the volunteers, all the generosity, and all the ways the community comes together in the aftermath of these devastating storms has been a tremendous gift and benefit."

In addition to the regular distribution of food, and assistance with utilities, rent and mortgage payments, Catholic Charities has helped pay for roofs, sent volunteers to do tree

removal, helped with interior work in homes, purchased appliances, and paid for hotel vouchers for those with no place to live within the first couple of months of the hurricane.

"We have distributed \$527,737 of direct assistance this past year, not including any money spent on food, to 2,381 households," Sister Miriam noted. "Of the more than half million spent, over 1,000 people were impacted by Hurricane Laura, and another 1,000 were impacted by Hurricane Delta."

Sister has set a monthly goal of collecting 10,000 pounds of donated food to help continue efforts to feed those impacted by the disasters. To donate, visit [www.catholiccharitiesswla.com](http://www.catholiccharitiesswla.com) and click on the Donate Now button, or you may drop off non-perishable food items to their warehouse at 1225 Second Street in Lake Charles. To volunteer your time, email [rickard.newman@lcdioocese.org](mailto:rickard.newman@lcdioocese.org).



**Bishop Glen John Provost paid a visit to Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School in Jennings on Monday, Aug. 31, 2020, less than one week after Hurricane Laura. He was joined by Father Keith Pellerin, pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church. OLI was the only school in the Diocese able to open immediately following the catastrophic storm that made landfall on Aug. 27.**

## Bishop's Statement on Vaccines and Health Measures

**Bishop Provost issued the following statement:**

"I remind the faithful of the Diocese of Lake Charles that it is morally permissible to receive COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are not produced using materials connected to abortion-derived cell lines, although they did make use of them in ancillary testing. The vaccines from Johnson and Johnson and AstraZeneca are produced using material connected to abortion-derived cell lines and are, therefore, more morally problematic than the alternatives. The cell lines in question were created from two abortions in the 1960s and have since been replicated in laboratories. In April of 2020, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops asked the federal government to ensure the production of morally permissible

COVID-19 vaccines. While it is tragic that no option currently available is entirely free of any connection to abortion, Catholics must know that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the United States Bishops have affirmed that it is morally permissible to receive COVID-19 vaccines.

"Furthermore, I remind the faithful, as I have reminded the pastors of the Diocese, that other health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should not be taken lightly. Please refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and State of Louisiana guidelines. In our area, the current rise in cases has placed an immense burden on our health care facilities, our medical professionals, and on those who suffer from the virus. We must remain diligent in our prayers for the health and safety of all and for an end to this contagion."

## LEGION OF MARY CENTENARY Local curia plans Mass of Thanksgiving Sept. 7

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

On September 7, 1921, the first meeting of the Legion of Mary — an organization of Catholic laity — took place in Dublin, Ireland. Today, the apostolic association founded by Frank Duff nearly 100 years ago has spread to 170 countries with six million members, many of whom are active in the Diocese of Lake Charles. The Legion draws its inspiration from St. Louis Marie de Montfort's book True Devotion to Mary.

To celebrate the Centenary of the Legion of Mary, a Mass of Thanksgiving will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday, September 7, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception with the Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, as officiant. The Legion has had a presence in Southwest Louisiana since 1971.

Currently, parishes with a Legion of Mary unit, known as a praesidium, in the Diocese of Lake Charles include Our Lady of LaSalette and Our Lady of Prompt Succor, both in Sulphur; Our Lady of LaSalette in DeQuincy; St. Theresa of the Child Jesus in Carlyss; and Our Lady Help of Christians in Jennings.

Judy Gregory, of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Catholic Church, said being involved with the Legion of Mary for the past 26 years is the only thing that has helped her live out her baptismal vows.

"I had been searching for something. When I joined the Legion of Mary, I finally found where I belonged," Gregory said, "The Legion teaches you how to evangelize. It was the beginning of my conversion even though I had been Catholic all my life. Through the Legion, I began to understand more about the Catholic faith. It has brought

me closer to God and to Mary."

All praesidia have a priest as a spiritual director, but otherwise the Legion and its officers are Catholic lay men and women. Each member promises to say the daily prayers (Tessera), attend weekly meetings, and perform two hours of apostolic service per week. The purpose of the service is both to help the church and community as well as fulfill members' baptismal promises by performing Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

Kitty Roberts, president of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Curia (higher council for the praesidia in the Diocese) is a parishioner of Our Lady of LaSalette Catholic Church in Sulphur. She said that she knew from her first meeting 12 years ago that the Legion would help deepen her faith and give her opportunities to learn more about the Blessed Mother.

"The Legion of Mary is about each member's own personal growth and what we do to imitate Mary's virtues. I wanted to live out those virtues," Roberts said. "The weekly meetings are a time to reflect on our spirituality."

Fay Barton, also a parishioner of Our Lady of LaSalette, had just retired when she was first invited to a meeting. While not familiar with the Legion of Mary, she was curious to learn more about it. Now, 30 years later, Barton said she, too, has noticed a deepening of her Catholic faith.

"The Legion of Mary is my life," Barton said, acknowledging that the promise to attend weekly meetings is a big commitment. "I know that no matter what else is going on in my life, Mary will work it out for me to get to my meeting, and she will work it out for me to do my work for that week."



**To commemorate the Centenary Year of the Legion of Mary, members of the local Curia planted a Southern Magnolia tree on April 17, 2021, in the prayer garden of Our Lady of LaSalette Catholic Church in Sulphur. The parish has served as the location of Curia meetings for the past 25 years. Father Andrews Kollannoor, M.S., the spiritual director for Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Curia in the Diocese of Lake Charles, blessed the tree during the dedication. (Photography credit: Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)**

## Annual Veritas Conference Sept. 25

LAKE CHARLES — The annual Veritas Conference will take place on Saturday, September 25, at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Family Life Center, 3939 Kingston Street, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The one-day faith formation conference will feature keynote speaker, Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, along with breakout sessions on various topics.

Deacon Burke-Sivers — known around the world as the "Dynamic Deacon" — will speak on Truth, Freedom, and the Human Person: Understanding Our Life in Christ. He is a powerful and passionate evangelist and preacher, whose no-nonsense approach to living and proclaiming the Catholic faith is sure to challenge and inspire those who hear him. His areas of expertise include marriage and family life, discerning the will of God, the

sacraments, male spirituality, pro-life issues, evangelization, prayer, and many others.

Breakout session topics and speakers include: **Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers:** Building a Civilization of Love; **Cay Gibson:** Creative Catechist; **Father Michael Beverung:** Confession and the Eucharist; **Father Sam Bond:** The Liturgy; **Father Andy DeRouen:** Architecture and the Eucharist; **Sister Mary Benedicta Maier, RSM:** Liturgy of the Hours; **Deacon Brian Soileau:** Adoration; and **Blaine and Denise Wyninger:** The Family and Sunday.

Registration fee of \$25 is

due by Wednesday, September 1; late registration is \$30 after this date, including the day of the conference. Lunch is included in the cost. Parents, teachers, and all adults are welcome to attend.

Register online at <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?c-st=6e8456>. If you do not feel comfortable registering and paying online, registration forms are available in the parishes of the Diocese of Lake Charles and at the Office of Religious Education, 411 Iris Street, Lake Charles. Call 337-439-7400 or email [victoria.walter@lcdioocese.org](mailto:victoria.walter@lcdioocese.org) for more information.

### Labor Day hours

The offices of the Diocese of Lake Charles will be closed in honor of Labor Day on Monday, Sept. 6. Office hours will revert from the summer Friday hours of 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. back to regular daily hours - 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.