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## **Hurricane Ida devastates the country, solidarity appeals for evacuees. Msgr. Gomez (Episcopal Conference of the United States): "We pray for the safety, well-being and protection of all."**

(New York) Drinking water. Parishes, Caritas and civil protection agencies and NGOs are urgently requesting drinking water. It is a basic necessity following the passage of Hurricane Ida, while more water continues inundating entire neighbourhoods in New Orleans, rural areas of Louisiana and vast areas of Mississippi and Tennessee. The other request, after water, is for power generators, to enable neighbourhoods or relief centres to charge mobile phones, warm up canned food, and provide air-conditioning for the sick. Gas cylinders are also needed to operate small camping stoves, in a State where almost everything is electrically powered. Louisiana's eight energy companies said yesterday it could be weeks before service is fully restored - the extent of the damage is overwhelming. *Hurricane Ida packed winds topping 240 km per hour, uprooting trees and power pylons, flooding entire towns and tearing off rooftops*, as occurred in a seven-storey apartment block in Metairie, whose residents managed to leave the building early. Of these, 34 elderly people were assisted in the nearby St Francis Xavier parish, converted into a temporary emergency shelter, but with no electricity. The water pipes in the building burst and storm waters continued rising when the civil protection corps contacted Father Palermo asking him to take in the latest evacuees. *The church provided blankets, water and sanitation, thus transforming the site of liturgical services into a home.* Holy Masses in the diocese have been temporarily suspended, and schools will remain closed until September 7. Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond visited some of the parishes and churches to assess the extent of the damage. *The prelate recorded a video message in the courtyard of one of the churches, recalling the Gospel episode of the calming of the storm and that "Jesus always promises to walk with us in the storms of life and the hurricanes of life."* Power was restored to some parts of New Orleans on Wednesday, but the mayor has imposed a citywide curfew to prevent theft and vandalism in the wake of the storm. Two people were arrested while rummaging through the debris of some houses. Emergency persists in rural areas where floodwaters are pouring in and people are still isolated. "South Lafourche is completely destroyed. There is no water, no electricity, no food, no gas. People feel they have been somewhat abandoned and I know they would be eternally grateful for any assistance they can get," said Noemi, whose family lives there. Deacon Jeff Tully, responsible for managing the diocese's healthcare facilities, said the damage was minimal, although the wind blew off the roof of one of the nursing homes. "There are obviously branches and debris everywhere. No deaths have been reported", the deacon remarked, pointing out that there is enough food and fuel available for seven days. Power generators will provide oxygen to the sick for a week or more. *In the meantime, Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana offered 900 meals for Hurricane Ida evacuees in Lake Charles, whose residents last year responded to relief efforts for those who had lost everything in the surrounding Texas area.* Offering a warm dish of spaghetti and meatballs with Parmesan cheese is the mission of chef José Andrés, founder of the World Central Kitchen, who has been serving meals and sandwiches both to residents who were forced to leave their homes and to first responders, who are tirelessly removing debris from the streets and restoring at least some viability. Andrés is travelling to the places hit by the hurricane to offer relief, also responding to Facebook appeals, after the destruction. "I have been trying to reach out to as many communities as I can, as rapidly as I can, especially people who have lost everything," the chef said, adding: *"No one should ever experience hunger ... and especially the lack of water, with such hot and humid weather conditions"* Archbishop José H. Gomez, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that numerous dioceses have been impacted by the storm, which continues causing damage as it moves inland. *Monsignor Gomez called on everyone to pray "for the safety, well-being and protection of everyone in these impacted areas", and "in a special way for the first responders, health care workers, and emergency personnel" who "bring relief, comfort, and healing."* He encouraged the

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entire faith community “and all people of goodwill across the country” to stand in solidarity with these impacted communities, offering financial contributions or volunteering to help those most direly affected.

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