



## DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

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*Office of the Bishop*

September 8, 2020

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Brother Bishops,

Beginning what promises to be a lengthy recovery from Hurricane Laura, I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the help that you have extended to us in the Diocese of Lake Charles. Some of you have visited. Many of you, our neighbors, have organized recovery groups to aid the victims. Still more of you from distant locations have contributed from already-stretched resources to our rebuilding efforts.

In my earlier letter, attached to the USCCB President's announcement of a voluntary national collection for other worthy recipients, I described, as best I could, the dire situation. Here at ground zero of Hurricane Laura, we know that this was no ordinary storm. One utility company's gauge clocked a wind gust of 187 mph! We sincerely appreciate your response to this Category 4 storm.

Because of your generosity, we have fed and are feeding thousands and assisting with humanitarian needs through Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana based in Lake Charles. A generator was installed at our retreat center to house the homeless priests. Thousands of tarps are being distributed and installed on leaking churches, houses, and businesses.

Last Saturday I visited two of the demolished parishes on the coast. One of them, Our Lady Star of the Sea, is a shrine, established by Bishop Maurice Schexnayder to commemorate the death of 500 men, women, and children in Hurricane Audrey of 1957. While attending the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Schexnayder commissioned the life-sized, Carrara marble statue of Our Lady. Every year at the start of the hurricane season we process to the shrine and offer Holy Mass. The church was destroyed. The statue of our Lady, with one arm raised to the Gulf and another embracing a child, still stands. The caption beneath the image reads, "Do not harm my children."

On Sunday I celebrated Mass for the survivors under a large tent along the highway to the Gulf. The Vicar General, Dean, and pastors of the demolished parishes joined me. Following Mass, we distributed generators, chain saws, and gift cards to the congregation. These immediate needs were provided through the generosity of Catholic Charities, bishops of the region, and Catholic Church parishes from various dioceses.

Our Lady Star of the Sea still stands. The message was not simply one of survival but of hope. All is not lost. To paraphrase the words of the Prayer of St. Bernadette, affliction is part of God's

Will, and our prayer is that He will not abandon us to affliction. For believers, affliction is an invitation to love.

This you know and this is what has motivated your kindness. Thank you! Please be assured of the prayers and gratitude of humble fishermen, oil field workers, farmers, and other good hardworking men and women in the Diocese of Lake Charles.

Asking God's blessings on you and your struggles, I remain

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glen John Provost". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

✠Glen John Provost  
Bishop of Lake Charles