

Churches respond to twin hurricanes in Cuba, Mexico

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LAM News Service

Miami (LAMNS)—Churches throughout the Caribbean and Central America are responding to damage from two hurricanes that tore through the area in late September and early October.

Residents of western Cuba told the *South-Florida Sun-Sentinel* that they could not remember when two back-to-back storms such as Hurricanes Isidore and Lily struck the island nation so close together.

The same region was hit last year by Hurricane Michelle, killing 5 and leaving \$1.8 billion in damage.

Isidore caused severe damage in the same area on September 20 and Hurricane Lily forced the evacuation of 163,000 people in Cuba on October 1. No deaths were reported there, but Lily left seven dead in Jamaica earlier in the week.

With heavy rains and winds, many homes and crops were reported destroyed. “Thank God that none of our churches or pastors were affected,” said Ramon Sanchez, president of the Free Will Baptist Convention in a telephone interview from Havana.

“Our members are involved in providing help to the people by providing clothing, household goods and taking up offerings,” Sanchez reported.

Sanchez said that the free Methodist Church has 26 churches with around 1,000 members in the Piñar del Rio area where the hurricane hit the hardest.

Meanwhile, churches in Mexico and Costa Rica were also responding to flooding and wind damage from Hurricane Isidore.

Hurricane Isidore caused \$600 million in agricultural damage, including virtually destroying the region’s papaya crop. Officials report that thousands are homeless across the Yucatan peninsula.

“The urgent needs of the brothers in these communities are basic food and water,” reported Pastor Gaspar Villanueva from Meridá where wind and rain destroyed or damaged houses and flooded farm acreage.

“Some government help is arriving, but it is insufficient,” Villanueva wrote in an email report to LAM. “Some North American brothers have sent cardboard roofing sheets for those who lost their roofs or houses.”

“We are busy attending to the needs of our congregations, but there are many needs in all parts of the area,” Villanueva said. “Many people need funds to build houses from

cement blocks and concrete roofs. The cardboard sheets are very fragile and we always have problems with them during storms and hurricanes.”

Villanueva said that farmers have lost their crops of corn, beans and vegetables and others lost their animals in the storm.

“An urgent problem has occurred in the communities where we had flooding and we can’t obtain pipes to extract the water,” Villanueva reported. “In Conkal, our church is surrounded by water. The pastor and other families from the community are living there because their houses were damaged.”

Fifty-two families in the churches of Tahmek, Ilil, Conkal and San Pedro Chimay have lost their houses.

Villanueva said that the communities could also use a portable water purification system because regular drinking water has been contaminated.

Meanwhile, to the south in Costa Rica, LAM missionary Lillian Solt reports that storms spawned by Hurricane Isidore washed out numerous bridges, temporarily trapping some short-term missionaries. “The rains were so hard that the water passed over the top of all of the bridges and four of them gave way,” Solt reported.

The Latin America Mission is releasing some funds to help with the situation in Mexico, according to Miguel Angel De Marco, LAM’s Vice President of Ministries. The mission is accepting donations for relief work in the region.

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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