



Diocese of Austin

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For Immediate Release – April 18, 2013

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Pope, Diocese respond to West tragedy

AUSTIN – On Wednesday evening, April 17, there was a massive explosion at the West Fertilizer Plant in West, which is in the Catholic Diocese of Austin.

The facilities of St. Mary, Church of the Assumption Parish were not damaged. The parish hall is being used as a command center for EMS. The parish and school are about 1 mile away from the fertilizer plant.

Earlier this morning, Pope Francis, through Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, sent a message to Bishop Joe S. Vásquez:

Saddened by the news of the destruction caused by the explosion in West, the Holy Father asks you kindly to convey his heartfelt condolences to the civil authorities and the afflicted families. He prays for the eternal rest of the victims and implores God's blessings of consolation and peace upon those who mourn and all who generously aid in the continuing work of relief.

Also this morning through his Twitter handle @Pontifex, Pope Francis tweeted, "Please join me in praying for the victims of the explosion in Texas and their families."

Bishop Vásquez asks, too, that all people pray for the people of West.

On Thursday, Bishop Vásquez sent a note of thanks to Pope Francis for his prayers and messages.

The parish in West was founded in 1892, making it 120 years old. The community of West is predominantly Czech; with most people tracing their ancestry to Moravian or German migrants in the 1870s. The community is mostly Catholic with a population of 2,900. The parish has 1,275 registered families. Father Ed Karasek has been pastor of the church since 1989. The parish is also home to a school, pre-K through eighth grade, with 136 students and 17 faculty members.

The Diocese of Austin, and its parishes and faith communities, is responding in a number of ways to this tragedy:

Communications

The Diocese of Austin is communicating with the media and public through official news releases, e-mail, social media and the diocesan website, www.austindiocese.org.

Prayer

- Priests of the Diocese of Austin came to area hospitals to administer sacraments and attend to the spiritual needs of the injured and their families, shortly after the explosion.
- Pope Francis and Bishop Vásquez ask everyone to pray for the people of West.
- The Thursday Masses at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin and the diocesan Pastoral Center were celebrated for the people of West.
- Bishop Vásquez will celebrate a Mass at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, April 21, at St. Mary, Church of the Assumption in West.
- Bishop Vásquez will visit West on Friday.
- Bishop Vásquez has approved the use of a special weekday Mass for the people of West.
- Bishop Vásquez has also sent a Universal Prayer for parishes to use this weekend at all Masses.

Assistance

- The Diocese of Austin will respond to the needs to those affected by the explosion with long-term case management. The American Red Cross provides disaster relief during the first 30 days. Beginning from the 31st day, Catholic Charities of Central Texas and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will take on cases referred by the American Red Cross, in addition to new cases. Long-term case management includes the distribution of furniture and household goods.
- There is a need for blood for victims of the explosion. Donate blood wherever you can.
- Monetary donations should be given to Catholic Charities of Central Texas, www.ccctx.org/disaster or The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, www.ssvdp.org.
- The Society of St. Vincent de Paul will accept donations of furniture and household goods, excluding clothes and mattresses, at two locations: 818 Yaeger Lane, Austin, Texas, 78753 and 1327 South Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78704. Donations are only accepted from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- All Catholic parishes are asked to take up a special collection this weekend or on another date that will be distributed through Catholic Charities of Central Texas.

Counseling

The diocesan Office of Family Counseling and Family Life is visiting West today to evaluate needs for licensed counselors in the area. Once the evaluation is complete, the appropriate resources will be assigned.

San Marcos in the south to the Bryan/College Station area in the east to Mason in the west. Its largest metropolitan areas are Austin, Bryan/College Station, the Killeen/Temple/Belton area and Waco. More than 109,000 Catholic families live in the diocese, approximately 509,000 Catholics. There are 227 priests, 168 deacons, 46 brothers and 102 sisters serving in the diocese.