



ELCA Disaster Response
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

NICARAGUA: TORRENTIAL RAINS & FLOODING

SITUATION REPORT #1

October 8, 2010

I. SUMMARY

- Tropical storm Matthew triggers torrential rains in midst of record-breaking rainy season
- Severe flooding in 80 of Nicaragua's 153 municipalities affecting more than 70,000 people
- 65 deaths reported, another 9,000 people evacuated from their homes
- Catastrophic crop losses of 80% or more in the case of basic grains such as corn & beans
- ELCA responding through the Action by Churches Together (ACT) forum in Nicaragua and through our companion church, the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith & Hope (ILFE)

II. SITUATION

The current rainy season in Nicaragua has seen a succession of severe weather events including more than a dozen national storm systems and a half dozen tropical waves or depressions that are characteristic of the hurricane season. Through mid-September, accumulated rainfall amounts in virtually all parts of the country were such that the ground had reached its saturation point.

Then tropical storm Matthew hit the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua on Sept. 24. For several days, continuous rains, flooding and landslides damaged highways, bridges, homes and crops in 80 of Nicaragua's 153 municipalities, including *Cabo Gracias a Dios* and *Bismona* on the Caribbean coast, the northern departments of *Estelí*, *Jinotega* and *Nueva Segovia*, the western departments of *León* and *Chinandega* and the southern departments of *Managua*, *Carazo* and *Rivas*.

On September 27, the Nicaraguan Institute for Territorial Studies (INETER) reported that the water level in Lake Xolotlán (Lake Managua) had risen to 42.2 meters, surpassing its level at the time of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and approaching the all-time record level of 43.33 meters in 1933.

Thus far, 65 deaths have been reported and nearly 9,000 people have had to evacuate their homes. Of the more than 250 communities affected, many have been cut off as a result of collapsed bridges and destroyed roads. Beyond widespread damage to Nicaragua's infrastructure, crop losses are approaching catastrophic levels.

The principal planting season in Nicaragua (*“la cosecha de primera”*) begins in May, ends in August and provides staple crops such as corn and beans for the majority of Nicaragua’s peasant farmers, their families and the general population. According to Angel Aragón, agronomist for the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE), farmers in western Nicaragua lost 80% of their first harvest this year due to the unseasonably high rainfall amounts that fell prior to tropical storm Matthew.

In a normal year, peasant farmers are able to plant a second time in September (*“la siembra de postrera”*) with another harvest in December. However, due to the torrential rains and flooding that occurred in the wake of tropical storm Matthew, seeds that were just planted to produce this second harvest will also be lost, contributing to an even more severe food crisis for peasant farmers and for the Nicaraguan population as a whole.

III. COORDINATED RESPONSE

The ELCA is supporting a multi-lateral response to this disaster through the Action by Churches Together (ACT) forum in Nicaragua whose members include: Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD), Inter-Church Center for Theological & Social Studies (CIEETS), Lutheran World Federation and the Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope in Nicaragua (ILFE).

In coordination with each other and with municipal and local committees for the prevention and attention to disasters, this ecumenical alliance of ACT members is providing humanitarian assistance to 675 families (approximately 3,440 persons) from 18 communities in three municipalities: *San Francisco Libre* (near the capital city of Managua) and *Somotillo* and *Villanueva* in western Nicaragua. Planned assistance will include:

- Basic food provisions for each family (rice, beans, sugar, salt, cooking oil and cereals)
- Medicines for the treatment of skin and respiratory diseases as well for the prevention of malaria, dengue and other insect-borne diseases
- Personal hygiene kits and other non-food items particularly for families who have been forced from their homes and have taken refuge in temporary shelters

The ELCA, with generous support from the South Dakota Synod, also is supporting the complementary relief and recovery efforts of the Lutheran Church of Faith & Hope in Nicaragua (ILFE) in 14 other localities, including communities in the municipalities of *Chinandega* and *Somoto*, where an additional 544 families (approximately 2800 persons) have suffered flood damage and crop losses.

In addition to distributing emergency food kits, ILFE is devoting special attention to the plight of peasant farmers. Their families and communities are facing acute food shortages given that they have neither food to eat nor crops to sell, and their next opportunity to replant won’t be until late in the spring of 2011.

As a partial remedy, ILFE plans to provide over 600 peasant farmers with seeds and fertilizer so that they can plant – for a third time – once flood waters recede and their land is dry enough to plant. During this abbreviated planting season, dry-weather crops such as sorghum and special bean varieties will be cultivated. These are crops which take advantage of the residual moisture in the soil at planting time but reach maturity and will be harvested several months into dry season which normally begins at the end of October.

IV. FUNDRAISING

All over the country, synods and congregations have encouraged giving to this vital work. The Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope in Nicaragua (Iglesia Luterana Fe y Esperanza) has already received more than \$15,000 to support relief and assistance work from individuals, congregations and synods.

Thanks to the ongoing faithful giving of Lutherans for mission and world hunger, the ELCA pledges that 100% of gifts designated for Nicaragua Flood Response will be spent for this disaster.

Contributions can be made to ELCA International Disaster Response: Nicaragua Flood Response by:

- Check or money orders sent to:
ELCA Disaster Response
39330 Treasury Center
Chicago, IL 60694-9300
Write "*Nicaragua Flood Response*" on your check's memo line.
- Credit card by phone to: 800-638-3522
- online at www.elca.org/donate

V. COMMUNICATION

- Up-to-date information about the ELCA response can be found at www.elca.org/disaster.
- A reproducible bulletin insert with information about the situation and the ELCA response can be downloaded at www.elca.org/disaster. Use the bulletin insert to share information and encourage support on Sunday mornings.

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