

**TOGETHER**



March 21, 2023

## Severe storms ravage Malawi

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In Malawi, where the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi has many churches and members, floods caused by Tropical Cyclone Freddy swept away entire villages earlier this month. Many homes have collapsed. Police officers and soldiers have been digging for victims buried under the mud and rocks as the death toll rose sharply. In the three countries affected (Malawi, Mozambique, and Madagascar), more than 500 people have been killed and hundreds are still missing. Those numbers will likely rise as information comes in from places that have been cut off from communication.


More than 300,000 people have been displaced. More than 280,000 children have been affected by the storm.

In addition to the destruction of homes and roads, the storm has inundated farmlands and destroyed crops, just as farmers were about to harvest the only crop of the year. This only increases the food crisis in Malawi, where 3.8 million people were already in need of food assistance before the storm.

Many governmental and private relief efforts are already underway to address the immediate needs. No doubt, there will be need for longer term assistance once the immediate crisis has passed.

As of today, we are waiting to hear how the storm has affected the congregations and members of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi. There is no doubt that our sister church body has been impacted. As we wait for word, WELS Christian Aid and Relief is ready to provide assistance in whatever way it can. If you would like to help in this effort with a financial gift, you can do so by making a gift online at [community.wels.net](https://community.wels.net).

Please keep our brothers and sisters in Malawi in your prayers.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

## New *Academia Cristo* church plant in Bolivia

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In February, representatives from WELS and partners throughout Latin America gathered in Cochabamba, Bolivia, to welcome a new church plant into fellowship. The new church in Cochabamba is the first one planted through *Academia Cristo*

outreach efforts, a milestone for mission work in Latin America.

“The goal of *Academia Cristo* has always been the planting of new churches, not just offering free online Bible studies,” says Rev. Matthew

Behmer, Latin America missionary. "It was a blessing to celebrate the gospel changing hearts of those in Cochabamba, and we're excited to see who else might learn about grace and what Jesus has done for them through other future church plants in Latin America."

This new church is led by Dr. Eduardo Milanesi, a surgeon and *Academia Cristo* student who began studying in the program in April 2020. In less than a year he finished the first part of the program, confessed doctrinal agreement, and started gathering a group in his medical office to study God's Word using study and worship resources provided by *Academia Cristo*. This "*grupos sembrador*," or church plant group, was also guided by a Latin America missionary. You can read more about the path of *Academia Cristo* in this article from the January 2022 edition of *Forward in Christ* magazine.

The church in Cochabamba declared fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*, a new synod that was formed in 2021 through the partnership of WELS sister churches across five countries throughout Latin America. This new synod allows these churches to do mission work together, train pastors together, and support each other with prayers and fellowship. It also provides a place to go for new churches formed out of *Academia Cristo* training efforts, just like the one in Cochabamba. WELS will be affirming fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* at the synod convention this summer.

Currently 51 other church planters and 21 church planter groups are on the same path Eduardo and his church took to fellowship. "This seed-sowing path took years to bear its first fruit,

and today we see it happen!" says Rev. Larry Schlomer, WELS World Missions administrator. "God has answered our prayers: More member churches are on the way. Church planting groups gathering in hotels, garages, living rooms, and patios are all following this same path. Each of these sites is a lightning rod for the power of Jesus' gospel as it is preached to many more. God's Spirit is at work."

Learn more about *Academia Cristo* at [wels.net/latinamerica](https://wels.net/latinamerica). 

## A small book with a big impact

Since its inception, WELS Christian Aid and Relief has been delivering hands-on disaster relief and humanitarian aid to communities around the world. During these times of disaster and trauma, WELS missionaries and volunteers aim to provide not only physical relief and assistance, but spiritual nourishment as well. The aim is to help people in their time of need and connect them with a church community for ongoing support.

To help get the gospel in the hands of disaster survivors, WELS Christian Aid and Relief developed a short devotional booklet in 2021 entitled *An Ever-Present Help in Trouble*. Rev. Daniel Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, explains, "I recognized that we really didn't have a printed resource that pastors and church members in areas that have been hit by a disaster could use as a tool for ministering to those who have been through the trauma of a disaster."


So Sims and nine of his colleagues wrote a total of 40 devotions and prayers based on gospel promises that are

comforting to people who have lived through a crisis or trauma. "When we have a major disaster situation, one of the first things we do is ship boxes of these devotions down to our churches so that the pastor and the people can begin using and distributing them," says Sims.

The books were thoughtfully designed with designated space in the front where a church body can place an informational sticker. Above that space it reads, "This little book of devotions is a gift to you from God's people at . . ." Readers are encouraged to contact the listed congregation for anything they might need.

The devotions and prayers within *An Ever-Present Help in Trouble* are brief with simple, straight-forward language. Sims explains that he and the other authors wrote these devotions with two audiences in mind. "One [is an audience] of people who have been through a huge disaster . . . and the other is for people who don't know much about Jesus."

These devotion books have already been put to good use in communities facing disasters. For example, after Hurricane Ida hit the Gulf Coast in 2021, a WELS congregation in Louisiana distributed copies of the book along with free meal packets to community members.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief now has partnered with Northwestern Publishing House to make copies available for everyone. Purchase *An Ever-Present Help in Trouble* at [nph.net](https://nph.net) for personal use or evangelism efforts. 

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