

Eight missing after Hurricane Ida destroys Baptist church in El Salvador

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FALLS CHURCH, Va. (ABP) — Seven children and one adult were reported missing after a Baptist church in El Salvador collapsed amid heavy rains and flooding caused by Hurricane Ida Nov. 8.

First Baptist Church in San Vicente was in an area in central El Salvador hit particularly hard by heavy rain during the night between Nov. 7 and Nov. 8. Government officials [said](#) 136 people were killed and at least 72 were missing because of mudslides and floods in the country of 5.7 million.

Concord Baptist Association in Jefferson City, Mo., has an ongoing mission partnership with Baptists in El Salvador. Calvin Brown, the association's director of missions, said Nov. 10 that he had spoken with a man traveling in the area — but that with roads closed due to flooding it might be Nov. 12 before his contact is able to reach the San Vicente area. Brown said he heard an unconfirmed report that, in all, nine members of First Baptist Church had died and several member families had lost their homes.

"We are mourning because today once again the rain has provoked desolation and death," Gloria Cabrera de Rivera, former president of the Baptist Women's Union of Latin America, wrote in an e-mail to the Baptist World Alliance.

Christian relief organizations geared up to respond to needs of about 13,000 people who saw their homes damaged by landslides or cut off by floodwaters in the tiny country. About the size of Massachusetts, El Salvador is located on the Pacific coast of Central America.

Sonia Valiente, president of the Baptist Association of El Salvador, said there is an urgent need for food, clean water and other supplies like mattresses. Cabrera de Rivera said there is also great need for clothing and shelter.

Neville Callam, the BWA's general secretary, [expressed](#) condolences and offered prayers on behalf of the global Baptist community. He said the global Baptist organization's relief-and-development arm, Baptist World Aid, "stands ready to offer any assistance we can."

Although Hurricane Ida did not hit El Salvador directly, the rain-creating weather system associated with the storm caused three days of heavy precipitation, including 14 inches of rain in one four-hour period. An estimated 1,800 homes were damaged or destroyed by rain-caused mud-and-rockslides from the volcano Chinchontepec.

"The coastal zone on the Pacific side and places bordering have been flattened," Cabrera de Rivera reported. "The volcanic mud slides have flattened anything that they have come in contact with and carried away human lives, houses and anything that existed."

After brushing El Salvador, a weakened Hurricane Ida made [landfall](#) in southern Alabama as a tropical storm early on Nov. 10.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.