News

Firefighters battle a wind-driven wildfire Oct. 25 in Canyon Country near Los Angeles. (CNS/Reuters/Gene Blevins)

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The Getty Fire that began whipping through mountain communities west of Los Angeles during the early hours of Oct. 28 caused the closure of several local Catholic schools, the evacuation of students and staff at Mount St. Mary's University and a call for the retired Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet to shelter in place.

By Oct. 29, the fire had burned more than 600 acres and was 5% contained, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department. Several neighborhoods were under evacuation orders, and at least eight homes had been destroyed.

Mount St. Mary's campus in the Brentwood neighborhood is located near where the fire started, and its students and staff were evacuated in the early morning hours. Students who did not go to their families' homes were brought to a nearby evacuation center or the university's satellite campus in another part of the city.

Ann McElaney-Johnson, the university's president, posted a letter to the campus community on Twitter Oct. 28 that said all students and staff members had all been evacuated and the campus experienced "no significant damage."

She thanked those who helped with the evacuation and called it "moving and gratifying to see how our faculty, staff and students come together in support of each other."

The Los Angeles Archdiocese announced that seven elementary schools and one high school were closed Oct. 28 because of the Getty and Tick fires. There was no announcement that these schools had reopened.

A local NBC affiliate, KNBC, reported that more than 80 retired Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and staff members had been sheltering in place.

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The convent lost power and generators were put into place as backup, said Los Angeles Fire Department Capt. Miguel Escoboedo.

He told the news station that the sisters, some of whom were on oxygen, were scared but in good spirits.

"We went in there and we calmed them down," he said. "We joked with them a little bit and make sure their medical needs work. They are a great bunch of ladies."

An Oct. 28 statement from the sisters on their website and posted on Facebook said they were safe and were remaining on site on the advice of the Los Angeles Fire Department and said that firefighters and police were with them.

"We cannot express enough our profound gratitude to the L.A. fire and police departments," the statement said. "These first responders not only saved our property but have been with the 80 Sisters sheltering in place since before dawn this morning. Their kindness was exceeded only by their remarkable skills."