Emergency personnel and divers work Jan. 30, 2025, in a search-and-rescue mission on the Potomac River in Washington after American Eagle flight 5342 collided with a Black Hawk Army helicopter late Jan. 29 while on approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport for landing and crashed into the river. Sixty passengers and four crew members were aboard the jet, and three soldiers were on the helicopter. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)

by Brian Fraga

Staff Reporter

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January 30, 2025
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Pope Francis and several Catholic bishops offered their prayers and condolences Thursday (Jan. 30) for the victims of a midair collision Wednesday night in Washington D.C. that killed dozens of passengers and crew members.

Around 9 p.m Jan. 29, a regional jet flying from Wichita, Kansas, collided with a U.S. Army helicopter while approaching Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The aircraft plummeted into the Potomac River, and more than 60 passengers and crew members on board American Airlines Flight 5342 were feared dead, the Associated Press reported.

Pope Francis, in a telegram sent Jan. 30 to President Donald Trump, expressed his "spiritual closeness" to all those affected, including his prayers for the first responders who have been retrieving the victims' bodies.

"In commending the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of Almighty God, I offer my deepest sympathies to the families who are now mourning the loss of a loved one," the pope said.
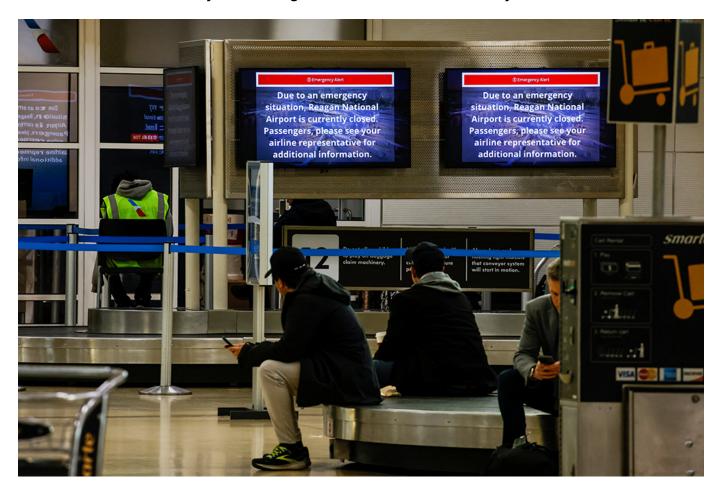
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Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington said in a Jan. 30 statement that "Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Washington today join men and women of good will here and around the world in praying for those who perished in last night's heartbreaking accident" and will also be praying for their "grieving families and loved ones."

"We praise God for the generous assistance of our courageous first responders," he said, and prayed that the disaster would "serve as an impetus to strengthen our unity and collaboration."

[In a statement posted on X](#), Baltimore Archbishop William Lori said: "Our hearts go out to those who lost their lives in the tragic collision at Reagan National Airport. Let us pray for them and for their loved ones who mourn them. Our thoughts and prayers are also with the first responders during this very difficult time."

Bishop Carl Kemme of Wichita, Kansas, [offered his prayers in a Facebook post.](#)

"The airplane originated from Wichita," Kemme wrote. "It is sobering to think that I and two other priests were on this very flight one week ago on our way to DC for [the] March for Life. May God bring divine assistance to everyone involved."

People sit at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, in the aftermath of the collision of American Eagle flight 5342 and a Black Hawk helicopter that crashed into the Potomac River, in Arlington, Virginia, U.S., Jan. 30, 2025. (Reuters/Eduardo Munoz)

On Jan. 30, Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, celebrated Mass livestreamed from the Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington. In his opening

words, he spoke of a "tendency to feel helpless" in light "of the horrific tragedy last night claiming so many lives."

"But we're not," Burbidge said. "We are able to gather here today in faith, and to entrust all those who have died to God's loving embrace, to ask the Lord to bless and console family members and friends, and to watch over all the first responders."

In his homily, Burbidge said that Wednesday night's tragedy was a reminder of how "fragile life really is."

Said Burbidge: "Each new day is a gift. Each moment we have with loved ones is a gift. Each day we have to do good for others is a gift. So perhaps the most powerful way we can honor those who lost their lives last night is to make sure we never take these gifts for granted."