

Diocese of Olympia
Inclement Weather Checklist
May 2019

1. Emergency calling protocols – all congregations need some form of calling tree when emergencies strike. Many congregations are unattended for many hours of the week yet water breaks, furnace failures, electrical problems and trees falling – the list is remarkably long. Most police and fire departments require emergency contact numbers and all congregations should have a list that is accurate with those two entities and have an internal list of who gets notified of emergency situations. Moreover, all renters of church property must know who to call if something happens when they are the only ones in the building. I would also try to hold them accountable in the rental agreement for not notifying the church of a problem with the facility.
2. Several people who could get to the church easily must know how to turn off power, water, gas, etc. to prevent more damage in cases of emergencies. They should also have a list of emergency numbers – including 24-hour electrical, plumbing, and heating services. Often greater damage occurs because the problem was left to fester and worsen, sometimes for hours, sometimes for days. At least shutting off systems can avoid greater damage. I know because I learned this the hard way one Sunday.
3. While we don't get much snow – usually – parking lots are critical to most congregations. Thinking through what to do about parking lot clearing is important. Clearing sidewalks, stairs, and other walk-ways – either removing snow or salting against ice needs to be done before services – which means thinking about who is capable of doing that work and arranging a protocol for that safety work happening in a timely fashion.
4. Up to date websites are critical. Use this for up to date information. Also being able to update the phone message remotely and knowing how and who will do it is crucial. People who call in should get an accurate response that is also timely. Congregations should be able to update both website and auto phone messages remotely.
5. In cases of snow and ice, maintenance of gutters and downspouts, clearing of parking lot drains and other outside drains around the buildings is very important. Ice dams can do remarkable damage to roofs, fascia, and sidings if left unattended. And all that snow and ice will melt and must go somewhere – and inside the building is not a good place for it.
6. Preventative maintenance lies at the heart of some of these issues. Having a regular and on-going maintenance plan can help even when snowmageddon strikes.
7. Finally, several people – including the rector or vicar – must know how their buildings work. Walking the building and grounds learning about where things are and are not is essential to managing a facility. One does not want to have to do that in the midst of an emergency.