

Diocese of Olympia Inclement Weather Ideas

Several submissions from congregations with excellent ideas are below.

The Rev. Kendall Haynes, Rector, St. Matthew, Browns Point:

See [Morning Prayer at Home](#) attachment.

Here is a copy of what we did for the weekend which began with two separate emails that we sent: one on Thursday at 7:19 PM and one on Saturday at 5:59 PM.

Part of the issue with any weather event is the inability to predict the severity. So for us, we wanted to establish with our folks a flexible system of communication well in advance of the storm so that people could get up-to-the-hour information without being bombed with multiple messages that might have conflicting information depending on when people might receive the information.

So about 24 hours prior to the storm, I sent out the first email below canceling all non-essential activities for Saturday. We also set the expectation that our website would be the central location for any and all cancellations during the event. Additionally, we set the expectation that the decision to cancel Sunday morning would occur by Saturday night at 7 PM. This gave people an opportunity to plan ahead and to know with certainty that a specific decision would be made at a specific time. This also gave maximum flexibility to determine the severity of the event in near real-time.

Meanwhile, on Thursday we prepared behind the scenes for the options of canceling and not canceling Sunday morning. While we prepared our materials as usual for Sunday morning, we also prepared a separate bulletin for Morning Prayer @ Home for folks to use either as individuals or as families. I also prepared a video homily to use in conjunction with the bulletin. Now I know a few colleagues that used Facebook Live to live stream MP on Sunday and I respect their decision to do so. I chose not to this as I feel that watching someone do Morning Prayer with all of the responses and readings on Facebook does not invite true interactivity in worship but rather slips into a mere viewing of worship which is in my view is contrary to the very purpose of worship. Instead, my goal was to give people the tools they needed to have live worship amongst themselves on their terms and with their God, which I think is more in line with why Cranmer developed MP & EP: to get worship out of the cloister and into the parlor. Additionally, not everyone has Facebook in our community yet everyone in our community (yes, 100%!) has email and internet access.

Lastly, I am one of those folks that believes in "Sunday is open no matter what". However, this event taught me/us some benefits to doing an alternative approach:

1. It conveyed that a proactive "safety first" approach was deeply pastoral. I received several messages of thanks for lifting the burden of obligation to be physically present at church. This approach seemed to meet people in their already anxious states and actually folks to have a worshipful experience at home without pressure or guilt.
2. It was far more expansive and inclusive to have "organized worship" at home rather than have only 10 people show up on Sunday and gloat with the "die-hards".
3. It exposed far more people to a refreshed usage of our already existing tools (website, email lists, Facebook, my sermon website, etc.) than is afforded under normal circumstances. We advertised our approach on Facebook and reached a great many people in our neighborhood who were experiencing cancellations from their own churches who appreciated using our resources (bulletin and video homily) for themselves. I even had someone say they would like to visit St. Matthew when the weather was clear!

So, in the end our experience was less transactionally focused ("should we have church or not") and more of an evangelistic opportunity. Being in a region where the weather rarely is this bad means that the weather itself is an opportunity for people to connect with each other and with God. I think applying thoughtfully basic understandings of our approach to worship to the technology that exists allows for live presence to be had without necessarily being in the building. Anyway, I hope this is helpful. Now onto my giant pile of "to-do's"!

Two suggestions:

1. If you are a town or city parish obey the law and clear snow and ice off the sidewalks. You don't want to be the only organization on the block with dangerous sidewalks.
 2. If you have mid-week celebrations or have a public daily office you need to post information on whether those services will happen. It's courteous and it sends a message regarding the importance of those services in the parish's life.
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The Rev. Lance Ousley, Former Priest in Charge, St. John, Kirkland:

Here is the communication we sent early Saturday afternoon about our services for Feb. 10, including links to the Sunday lectionary and Mission St. Clare. We had sent a prior email on Thursday for the congregation to watch for an email announcement on Saturday afternoon about Sunday's services. These were posted on Facebook and Twitter as well.

The top portion of our website message about services was posted.

A follow-up email was sent about Sunday's "Snow Mass" service with the story of the 40% that gathered (4 of 10) that were newcomers and other weather related information as it affects our activities.

I employed much of what I learned dealing with floods and hurricanes in previous parishes and how we can carry on our work in prudent and responsible safety. Holy Family Catholic Church in Kirkland didn't cancel any services, but they also have a large staff with full-time sextons that were able to clear their parking lot and sidewalks. We don't have that luxury!

The Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, Rector, Trinity, Everett:

In the case of Trinity Everett, I made arrangements to stay over here on Saturday night (the evening of the Maine election) because I was concerned that weather conditions would make it impossible for me to get out of my driveway and side roads on Whidbey. Nigel and his leadership made the decision to cancel services (which was very wise for Whidbey).

On Saturday afternoon, I met up at the church with several of our buildings and grounds volunteers. We rented and drove a snow Cat with a plow to plow out the parking lot and street parking, while other volunteers shoveled and sanded our sidewalks and steps. Our usual organist was on vacation, and his substitute contacted me to say he would not be coming on Sunday morning.

I had suspected earlier in the week that we might not have an organist or many choir members. Knowing that would likely be the case, I had our Parish Administrator order several boxes of Kazoos from Amazon Prime, and they arrived on Friday. To my surprise, we actually did have a dozen folks at our early service and about 50 folks show up for our second service. The kazoos were passed out to everyone in attendance. About 10 of our regular choir members made it in, so they led the congregation in singing the hymns. People were invited to either sing or play their kazoos as back up. My favorite part was when the mini-choir spontaneously played a kazoo postlude of Pachelbel's canon at the conclusion of the second service. However, you can hear the recessional hymn with kazoos on our YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTYaxfCSSGw>

The Ven. Gen Grewell, Archdeacon, Diocese of Olympia:

Here are some thoughts I have in no particular order of importance:

- Confer with other congregations about their situation in close proximity of you.
- If possible, watch the news forecasters. They have individuals placed strategically and driving the streets so know first hand the situations.

- While social media is a good thing, we also need to remember that our websites are a form of social media so need to place something there too.
- Update phone message at church.
- Notify those parishioners who may not use any kind of social media.
- Have a contingency plan in place “just in case”. I loved Steve’s story about the Maintenance group using a wood pallet drug behind a truck to make piles of snow and clear the parking lot.
- Make sure everyone is safe.

The Rev. Josh Hosler, Rector, Good Shepherd, Federal Way:

We had great success doing Morning Prayer over Facebook Live. It enabled several parishioners to “come to worship” for the first time in a very long time!

The Rev. Vicki Betsinger, Vicar, St. Hugh of Lincoln, Allyn:

On Sunday, 10 February, we did not hold church services at St. Hugh in Allyn as streets had not been plowed and were impassable. Highway 3, the state highway had been plowed but nothing else had been done at that point.

Here's how we handled it:

Before: Several years ago, we established a phone tree, whereby the presiding priest for the day of the event confers with the Senior Warden to determine if church services can be held or should be cancelled. The presiding priest calls the other clergy of St. Hugh and the five people who are the Phone Tree Contact Points informing them of the decision. All the members of the congregation have been assigned to one of the five Contact Points. The five Contact Points then make the calls to notify members of the decision. We also check our supply of sand and rock salt to ensure sufficient quantities are available.

While in the event: The morning of 10 February, I was the presiding priest and Barry is the senior warden, so we discussed options. As of Sunday morning, we had a foot of snow. The roads were a mess, as we knew our church parking lot would be. We made the decision to not hold church services that day. Our members come from Shelton, Harstine Island, Grapeview, Bremerton, Belfair, the Key Peninsula, as well as Allyn. We have no public transportation available in this rural area on Sundays and we determined the driving conditions were just too dangerous. We invoked the Phone Tree process and all were notified of our decision to have people stay home and be safe.

After the event: Mason County only maintains Wheelwright St., the road leading to St. Hugh, part way. Our Senior Warden obtained the name and phone number of a local resident that was willing to come down on Saturday, 16 February to plow the portion of the road not

maintained by the county as well as our parking lot. Since the forecast for Saturday night were for temperatures dipping below freezing, when the parking lot was cleared, we spread sand and rock salt on the main walkways. Someone is assigned, usually it's Barry, to stand at the door of the church and help those that may require assistance.

The Rev. Nigel Taber-Hamilton, Former Rector, St. Augustine's in the Woods, Freeland"

See [*Cancellation Policy of St. Augustine's in the Wood, Freeland*](#) attachment.

So we had stuff on our web-page, our answering machine, and we sent out ConstantContact updates regularly, including cancelling services at least by noon the previous day. This is part of our policy, which I've attached. I suspect we're more likely to need this than suburban/urban congregations, but feel free to borrow!