



CATHOLIC COURIER

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Crippling crystals

Region chilled by icy assault

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — St. Mary's Hospital admitted two patients Monday, March 4, for hypothermia — a condition in which the patient's internal body temperature drops below 95 degrees.

Bethany House of Hospitality, 169 St. Bridget's Drive, took in an extra guest for the night, and Holy Family Convent on Jay Street sheltered an elderly woman whose relatives feared she would develop hypothermia if she remained in their unheated home.

Numerous diocesan parishes reported broken branches scattered here and there, and trees down on church grounds. One pastor was kept busy pumping out water

trapped above a shallow layer of cold air. Several thousand feet up, the moisture began raining into the layer of cold air, where it froze into the freezing rain that devastated the area, said Williams, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

The storm encompassed an area almost as big as the diocese itself — taking in Monroe, Wayne, Ontario, Cayuga, Yates, Seneca and Steuben counties, and other areas west of the diocesan border. According to several television, radio and newspaper accounts, more than 200,000 homes and businesses had lost power throughout western New York in what was possibly the area's worst ice storm of the century.

By Tuesday, March 5, approximately



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

South Avenue resident Dave Warney, a parishioner at St. Boniface Church, spent a better part of March 4 chopping ice-laden tree limbs in the aftermath of the ice storm.

that was seeping into the basement of the parish nursery school.

Employees of Catholic institutions made their way to work slowly or not at all, depending on the amount of debris blocking the roads in their neighborhoods and how much sleep they had lost while shivering through the previous night without heat and/or electricity.

Eventually those who experienced the trials of this week may knowingly glance at each other in the future and say that they had lived through the "Ice Storm of '91" — in which hundreds of thousands of homes, businesses, schools and streets throughout the diocese's northwestern section were darkened in forced homage to the whims of nature.

For the time being, however, residents are struggling to stay warm and hoping that utilities soon will be restored after the storm, which began Sunday, March 3, subsided on Monday morning.

"Well, the worst of the icing is now over," Kevin Williams commented Monday afternoon, March 11.

Williams, meteorologist for Rochester's WROC-TV Channel 8 and WHAM-1180AM, likened the intensity of the storm to a hurricane coming off the Atlantic Ocean.

He explained that the storm was caused by huge amounts of tropical moisture being

130,000 customers of Rochester Gas & Electric Corp. were without power, according to William J. Schrouder, company spokesman. Schrouder speculated it would take "a few days" before power could be restored to the majority of RG&E customers. He noted that eight of the utility's 60 transmission lines were knocked out by the storm, and that 100 repair crews — including 39 from out of state — were working to fix the problem.

Telephone attempts to assess storm damage on diocesan parishes and Catholic institutions were met with busy signals, out-of-order messages or no answers at all.

Those who did manage to answer the phone told varying tales of the ice storm's effect on them.

• St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary, 4095 East Ave., Rochester, lost most of its power on Monday morning, and several members of its 90-person staff couldn't make it to work that day, according to Sister Mary Ida Lynch, SSI, local coordinator at the infirmary.

About 15 Sisters of St. Joseph from the order's motherhouse helped serve meals to the infirmary's 85 sick and elderly residents, Sister Lynch said. She noted that the infirmary was using space heaters "in strategic places" to keep residents warm, adding that it was difficult to move many of them because of their condition.



A pedestrian is dwarfed by fallen trees along South Goodman Street near the entrance to The Divinity School and St. Bernard's Institute.

• Sister Marie Michelle Peartree, SSJ, president of St. Ann's Home/The Heritage in Rochester, noted Monday that she was operating with a "skeletal staff," stationing administrators at receptionists' desks to direct employees to where they were most needed. The institution was using backup generators to deal with the power loss, she said.

• In Newark, Father Edward F. Steinkirchner, pastor of St. Michael's Church, said the Wayne County parish was without heat most of the night, but that things were improving by about 10 a.m. Monday.

• Paul Tantillo, a staff member at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, noted that volunteers had come in to trim tree limbs that had fallen in the facility's parking lot. Although the shelter

had taken no extra measures to assist those who had lost power in the storm, he pointed out that it might make extra overnight beds available and lend space heaters to individuals if necessary.

• St. John Fisher College's driveways were blocked by downed trees and broken limbs, according to Father Mitch Dowalgo, director of campus ministry. The college joined dozens of other public and parochial schools that were closed Monday.

• Alonzo Jones Dukes, a greeter at St. Bridget's Shelter in Rochester, said he had seen "six new faces" in the shelter Monday night, and that "we have more women tonight than usually."

He said, however, that he did not know if the new faces were a direct result of the storm.