

DIOCESAN NEWS

Winter storms lead to cancellations, closings

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Last week's series of snowstorms in western New York decreased attendance at or wiped out many diocesan activities, but apparently caused few hardships to the diocese's church buildings.

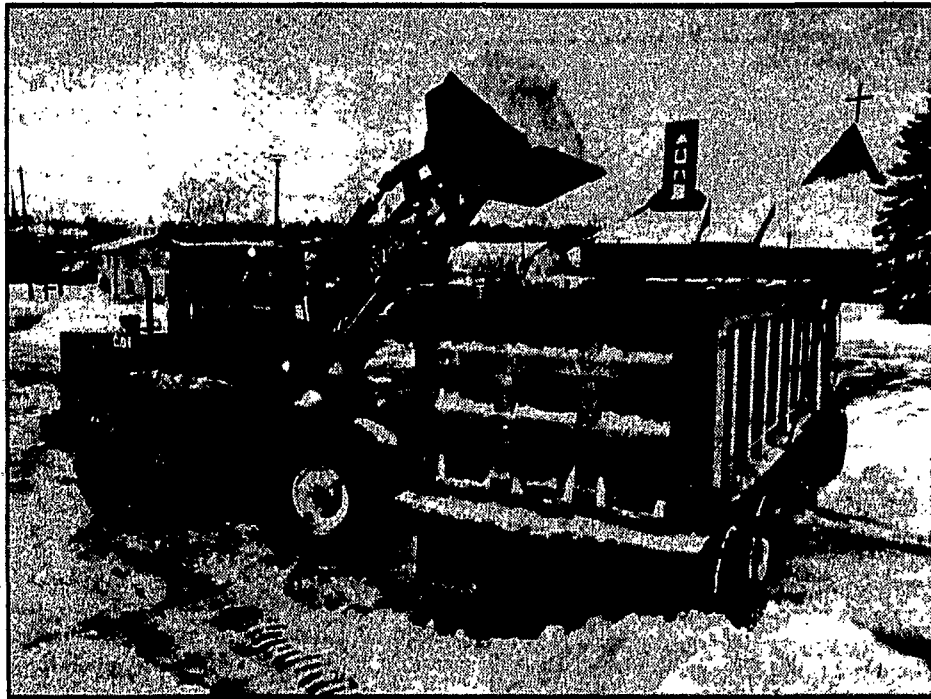
Kevin Williams, meteorologist for WHEC-TV and WHAM radio in Rochester, said the storm dropped 2 to 3 feet of snow in counties along Lake Ontario from Buffalo to Rochester. One to 2 feet were recorded in the Finger Lakes area, and a few inches to a foot in the Southern Tier.

Williams added that 30 inches of snow were measured on the ground at the Greater Rochester International Airport Jan. 15 — the greatest amount on the ground at one time since February 1978.

Sister Patricia Carroll, SSJ, diocesan assistant superintendent, said that several Catholic schools in Monroe County were closed Jan. 14, and all were closed Jan. 15. Joe Kosmicki, development director of Holy Family Catholic Schools in Elmira, said that all Catholic schools in Chemung County were closed both Jan. 14 and 15. The Southern Tier cancellations, Kosmicki noted, were due primarily to icy roads.

Sister Carroll explained that diocesan Catholic schools are closed based on decisions made by the public school districts in which they're located.

The storms also forced cancellation of two weekend appearances by Father Charles Curran, a diocesan priest who



A front-loader clears snow to be hauled away from the parking lot of Church of the Assumption, Fairport, Jan. 16.

teaches at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He had been scheduled to lecture Jan. 15 at Nazareth College and also conduct a workshop for spirituality leaders Jan. 16 at the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center in Irondequoit. Those events have been rescheduled for April 23 and 24.

The storms forced a sizable drop in attendance for the 7:30 a.m. weekday Mass at Holy Cross Church in Rochester. Father

Thomas Wheeland, pastor, said that the Mass, which normally draws 70 people, was down to 12 people Jan. 14 and only seven Jan. 15 — even though the parking lot and nearby main roads were well plowed.

"There was no problem getting in here. It was the people getting out of the side streets," the pastor explained.

Father Stan Kacprzak, pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Greece, cancelled

the 8 a.m. Mass Jan. 15, citing safety concerns for the mostly senior citizen contingent that attends the liturgy.

"If we'd had Mass, they would make an effort to be there. I figured I would take that temptation away from them," Father Kacprzak said.

Deacon Ray Mielcarek, pastoral administrator at St. Stanislaus Church in Rochester, said approximately 10 people attended the 8 a.m. Masses Jan. 14 and 15 — less than half the usual numbers.

Because of the substantial snowfall, Deacon Mielcarek said he was thankful the parish had just completed extensive roof repairs in late December. If the repairs had been finished two weeks later, he remarked, "We would have been in trouble."

Father Wheeland said that roof leakage at Holy Cross caused about \$1,500 damage. Eric Patchke, diocesan manager of buildings and properties, said that the only other damage he was aware of at diocesan parishes was at St. Mary's Church in Honeoye, where the snow caused renewal of a chronic leakage problem.

In Watkins Glen, Father David Bonin, pastor of the Schuyler Catholic Community, said only about four people attended the 12:10 p.m. Mass Jan. 14 and the 9 a.m. Mass Jan. 15 at St. Mary of the Lake Church.

However, Father Bonin said he was still able to attend a weekend teen retreat near Ithaca. Ironically, he noted, attendance for the retreat actually increased after some teens found that other area events had been cancelled.

Bishop decries death sentence imposed on Rochester killer

In a written statement, Bishop Matthew H. Clark decried the death sentence imposed on convicted murderer Angel Mateo, and pledged that the diocese will continue to work against the death penalty.

"This is a sad day for our community," Bishop Clark said in the statement issued after Mateo's Jan. 15 sentencing. "Today we have chosen to impose death, in our name, to punish a fellow citizen convicted of murder."

Monroe County Court Judge John J. Connell imposed the verdict that had been chosen by a jury. In December the jury had convicted Mateo of first-degree murder. Mateo was convicted of kidnapping Juan Rodriguez-Matos, shooting him in the head and then suffocating him.

Mateo is only the second New Yorker to

be sent to death row since the state restored the death penalty in 1995.

"As leader of a Church that defends life whenever it is threatened, not only by capital punishment, but also by abortion, euthanasia, poverty, violence and war, I deeply regret this decision," the bishop said in his statement. "The sentence ignores the human dignity inherent in every person. Life imprisonment without parole would have sufficiently punished Angel Mateo for his terrible crimes ..."

According to reports, Connell also set an execution date for Mateo of March 1. But the sentence will automatically be put on hold by mandatory appeals that could take several years to resolve. Connell also ordered Mateo to serve 128½ years in prison

for 11 other felonies connected with Rodriguez-Matos' murder, including attempted murder and kidnapping. Mateo is also accused of having murdered three other Rochester men in 1995, and still faces trials on those charges.

In the conclusion of his statement, Bishop Clark appealed to the community to seek alternatives to the death penalty.

"I reach out to the family of the victim and to the Mateo family in sorrow," the bishop said. "I also challenge all people directly and indirectly touched by this decision to ... to prevent crime and heal the wounds of those who have been victimized, without resorting to violence."

Suzanne Schnittman, the diocese's consistent life coordinator, said that she was

part of an interfaith group called the Reconciliation Network that held vigils outside the Hall of Justice against the death penalty during Mateo's trial.

Schnittman noted that some may misinterpret the network's vigils and the bishop's statement as defending Mateo's actions.

"I'm not defending Angel Mateo," she said. "I'm defending the concept that we have to believe that everybody has some facet that is redeemable. I guess I'm defending that ... sacredness of life, and who are we to decide that somebody doesn't have it?"

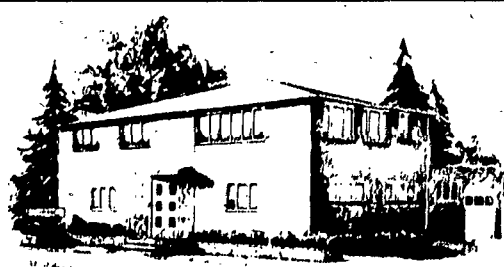
— Rob Cullivan

Kids' Answers from page 12

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