News

A woman rows a paddleboard down a flooded main street with American flags lining the stree

A woman rows a paddle board in a flooded area in Montpelier, Vt., July 11, 2023. Severe storms that left at least one dead in Orange County, N.Y., dumped heavy rainfall at intense rates over parts of the Northeast, forcing road closures, water rescues and urgent warnings about life-threatening flash floods. (OSV News photo/Brian Snyder, Reuters)

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Ludlow, Vt. — July 13, 2023

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As flood waters rose throughout Vermont during the July 10 torrential rains, at least one Catholic parish opened its facilities for people who needed a place to wait out the flooding and make post-flood plans.

In Ludlow, Fr. Thomas Mosher, pastor of Annunciation Parish, opened the parish hall and parking lot to people who needed a place to stay the night of July 10.

About a dozen people slept in the parish hall, where a parishioner furnished a hot meal. Others parked their campers and stayed in the parking lot where still others found a safe place to leave their cars. "We're on higher ground," the pastor said.

"Word went out through the community, and people heard they could come," Mosher told Vermont Catholic, Burlington's diocesan publication. "Really, there was nowhere else to go."

The community center, designated for just such an emergency center, had been flooded. "It's one of the corporal works of mercy -- shelter the homeless," the pastor said, adding that people were not necessarily homeless but had to be evacuated from their homes because of the flooding.

He surveyed the "devastation" by car and noted many people were pumping water from their basements. Route 103 had been reopened, but many side roads were still closed and some bridges impassable. One mudslide left the railroad tracks the land had supported hanging like a clothesline. "Usually we have six trains a day passing through," Mosher said.

Many people were asking, "What, again?" he said, referring to the devastation that happened in Vermont during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011.

An updated survey of damage to church property in the statewide Burlington Diocese indicated several churches and rectories had water in the basement. There also were three properties with ceiling damage, and one church with minor exterior damage. The athletic fields of Mount St. Joseph Academy in Rutland were flooded. This information was provided by Peter Beauregard, director of properties for the Diocese of Burlington.

Parts of one of Vermont's main highways, Interstate 89, were closed in both directions July 10. According to Vermont State Police, the closures were necessary because of excessive water on the roadway and the inability of drainage systems to keep pace with the volume of water. By mid-morning July 11, the highway had reopened.

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Vermont State Police were aware of reports that an unknown number of vehicles were stranded in the vicinity of the on-ramps to I-89 northbound and southbound in Montpelier. There were no reports of immediate threats posed by high water, but the vehicles were unable to move due to flooding and road closures in the area. The state police coordinated a response to this situation, determining the level of public

assistance needed, and worked to help vehicles travel southbound on the interstate from this location.

President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency in Vermont July 11.

Vermont Emergency Management warned the same day that dangers from flooding were not over and urged people to continue to use caution noting that floodwaters might contain downed power lines, human and livestock waste, hazardous waste, physical objects and debris, and wild or stray animals.

Across the Connecticut River in New Hampshire, southwestern towns of Winchester and Swanzey were hard hit by flood waters that eroded roads and overflowed a dam. Fr. Alan Tremblay, pastor of Parish of the Holy Spirit which includes the affected towns, said July 11 that no requests for aid had yet been made, "but that doesn't mean it won't happen."

He suggested that the parish would be offering assistance as needs arose when fall-out from the flooding was felt in the future. "People here look out for each other, … and the church always strives to connect with people" in need, he told Vermont Catholic, Burlington's diocesan publication.

He expects parishioners will be looking for ways to help their neighbors affected by the flooding "as the days unfold," and the parish -- with two churches in Keene and one in Hinsdale -- "stands ready to help because of the generosity of parishioners."

There are two St. Vincent de Paul food pantries in the parish, one in Keene and one in Winchester.

In Vermont, Vermont Catholic Charities Inc. has an emergency assistance fund.