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Worshippers in New Jersey turn to God after Hurricane Sandy

Patricia Lefevere | Oct. 31, 2012 NCR Today
Hurricane Sandy

Almost all are without power in Bergen County, New Jersey's largest county of 1.1 million, which is about 28 percent Catholic. People are still assessing their damage, but there is much tree destruction, even some houses split in two -- one reportedly had adults sleeping on one side, children on the other of where a tree fell. All are safe.

At 7:30 a.m. Mass on Tuesday, Carmelite Fr. Hilary Milton, pastor of St. Cecilia's parish in Englewood, N.J., said he always has a prayer for such disasters, but could not remember it or find it in the wake of this mishap.

Instead, he said: "I know it begins: 'O God, we praise you.' " In the midst of such wind and water damage, "perhaps that's all there is to say," he said, recognizing the "power of God" and his mercy in sparing so many lives. As bad as things are, almost everyone believes they could have been much worse.

The Franciscan Convent in Tenafly, N.J., which houses about 40 elderly and retired Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, usually manages with a generator in such circumstances, but even their generator failed when the brunt of Sandy struck about 6 p.m. Monday. Most of the sisters were still in the dining room at supper. In the end, the sisters had to call the Tenafly police, who arrived shortly and carried each sister who could not make it up the stairs to her bedroom. The sisters are very grateful and all had a good night's rest, waking in the morning to find one of their Norwegian pines toppled near a Marian shrine on the property -- one of hundreds of sturdy pines and oaks felled in Sandy's blowout.

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor on Tenafly Road in Englewood, who always slows traffic with his outdoor church signs, reacted to Sandy in a few simple words: "In an emergency, don't exit, turn to God."

People seem to be doing just that. The crowd at the 7:30 a.m. Mass at St. Cecilia on Wednesday was double the number of those attending Tuesday. People are chilly in New Jersey, but not that cold yet, though temperatures dip into the low 40s. PSE&G, the major utility supplier, has emailed customers that their power will not be restored before late Monday. Random acts of kindness are apparent everywhere, with people buying hot coffee and warm food and delivering breakfast to friends who have overseas visitors who cannot return to their country because of the closed airports.

There is great flooding in Paterson diocese and much wind damage in Archdiocese of Newark.

Cost of storm repair in New York and New Jersey is being talked about in the range of $50 billion and could take months.

The New York Stock Exchange has not been closed for weather reasons since 1888. It opened Wednesday morning after a two-day shutdown.

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