

Communicating Emergency Information to Parish

Events occur where critical information must be distributed to the parish. The most likely incident is when the parish facilities can not be used for normal business. For major natural events including wind and winter storms, flooding, and tsunami, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issues bulletins which media relay. The parish may also decide to reinforce more local issues such as evacuation preparation. But, there also are instances where an emergency, e.g. tsunami or flood is expected and warnings should be broadcast. Although the media relay weather watches and warnings they may not impart specific enough information regarding the parish. Also, after an event, the rector or wardens may want to gather parishioners at a central location. One element regarding closures and sometimes overlooked is notifying user groups, e.g., food pantry.

Smaller Parishes and Those in Smaller Communities

Most local radio stations will broadcast a closure message. Some communities have reverse 911. The parish also can make a policy of following local school closures.

For alerting parishioners, both e-mail and telephone trees are easy to use. Most e-mail providers have a group e-mail feature. One message can be transmitted to all recipients on the contact list. The difficulty with e-mail is 1) not everyone has or normally uses e-mail, and 2) the e-mail lists need to be kept current.

The traditional telephone tree can work. It depends on having duplicated callers to ensure the message is distributed. American Association of University Women has a sample available at <http://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-build-a-phone-tree/>. There also are services which can be used, often priced per call, e.g., 9.9 cents, see: <https://www.callmultiplier.com/>.

Larger Parishes or Those in Larger Cities*

Each parish should have several people authorized to close facilities or distribute emergency messages. Generally the rector will make the decision, but in his or her absence, at least two other people need to be empowered.

Broadcast media, radio, and TV will provide information about an expected emergency, such as flood, fire, and tsunami. However, for emergency closure of the parish facilities other steps are needed. There is an Internet site, Flash Alert, at: <http://www.flashalert.net/>. This site allows the user to post emergency closure messages which are picked up by radio and TV and are likely to be broadcast. The service is available in the Portland/Vancouver/Salem, and Eugene metro areas. St. Bartholomew's (Beaverton) closure policy is that they follow the Beaverton School District closures. Most telephone systems allow remote access to answering messages which can be changed to reflect events as needed.

Providing messages to individual parishioners can use e-mail, either through a provider or “groups” available on most e-mail systems. Additionally, there is an Internet site, Constant Contact, <http://search.constantcontact.com/>, which for a monthly maintenance fee can broadcast e-mail and text messages. Either with group e-mail or Internet sites, the addresses and telephone numbers must be kept current. Another Internet approach is an automatic phone tree such as Call Multiplier, <http://www.callmultiplier.com/>. This site costs 9.9 cents per call if used occasionally. For a parish of 300 families, the cost of \$30 can be an inexpensive, effective medium. As with e-mail, the telephone number list needs to be kept current. However, such sites allow the church to contact users at the same time as its parishioners.

*Acknowledgement is provided to Ms Judy Bennett, Parish Administrator of St Bartholomew’s Beaverton for development and assistance.