

Snow event closes all but handful of schools in Baltimore Archdiocese

It was business as usual in Hagerstown.

In Bel Air, meanwhile, 16 students with keen weather forecasting skills added recognition from their pastor to their first snow day of the season.

All but three elementary and high schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore were closed Jan. 4, when Central Maryland received a relatively light snowfall but strong, bone-chilling winds on the western front of a “bomb cyclone” that caused more severe hardship on the Eastern Shore.

Schools in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford and Howard counties were closed. Several of those jurisdictions, such as Anne Arundel and Harford, have already announced two-hour delays for Jan. 5.

Schools in Washington County, including St. Maria Goretti High School and St. Mary Catholic School in Hagerstown, opened on time Jan. 4.

St. Mary, a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, went ahead with a geography bee in the afternoon. At St. Maria Goretti, it was another day of learning for students and staff such as Genie Massey, who teaches social studies.

“We just had a few snowflakes in the morning,” said Massey, who grew up in the Miami area and is in her seventh year teaching at Goretti.

While some of their counterparts in the Baltimore area were waiting out two-hour delays that turned into closures, Massey’s AP European History class dug into the Congress of Vienna “and the importance of the Catholic Church in Austria” at 8:15 a.m. Her AP U.S. History class, which began at 9:09 a.m., discussed westward expansion in the mid-19th century.

Bishop Walsh School in Cumberland opened two hours late, along with other schools in Allegany County. It was one of five schools in the archdiocese that, because of

issues with water pipes and lines, dealt with delays or closings as students returned after the Christmas break.

According to Tom Alban, director of Risk Management for the archdiocese, a water line that feeds the kindergarten area at Bishop Walsh ruptured over the Christmas break, leading to the relocation of the kindergarten to other space in the building when school resumed Jan. 2.

Elsewhere, according to Alban:

- School of the Incarnation in Gambrills was closed Jan. 2 and 3 after a sprinkler froze in the main utility room, causing damage to three electrical panels. Had Anne Arundel County schools opened Jan. 4, Incarnation would have been ready for students to return.
- Our Lady of Victory School in Arbutus closed early Jan. 3 because of a water line break on Leeds Avenue. Had Baltimore County schools opened Jan. 4, it would have remained closed, but it will open Jan. 5 as scheduled.
- At St. John the Evangelist School in Hydes, a water line to a boiler split and flooded a utility room, delaying the New Year return from Jan. 2 to Jan. 3.
- A boiler cracked at St. Joseph School in Fullerton the morning of Jan. 2, relocating some students and then causing an early dismissal. It was closed Jan. 3.

At St. Margaret School in Bel Air, meanwhile, the personal budget of Monsignor Kevin T. Schenning took a hit when 16 students and principal Madeleine Hobik nailed Jan. 4 as their selection in last September's "Snow Day Pool," which has students and faculty guess the first date schools will deal with a winter weather closure.

Monsignor Schenning, the pastor, offers gift certificates to those who make the correct prediction, \$25 for staff and \$10 for students.

"We (Harford County) had a 2-hour delay at first, but then Baltimore County closed and Baltimore City closed, so you knew what was going to happen," he said. "The kids remember their (pool) dates. We're having fun here."

Masses at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin

Mary and the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, as well as other churches in affected jurisdictions, were canceled.

Visual journalist Kevin J. Parks contributed to this article.

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