

# Winter storms may be difficult, but can bring out the best in us

When the Baltimore area has gotten more snow this winter than my native Chicago area (45 inches as of Feb. 8, compared to 32 inches in the Windy City), something must be terribly wrong with the balance of nature. Yes, we've heard all about the El Niño effect, and moisture coming from the Gulf of Mexico, combined with cold air masses. This results in a whole lot of snow, and it all has landed on our roofs and sidewalks, streets and highways, parking lots and playgrounds.

Enough already.

Back when I was little, we were told that thunder was the angels bowling and snowfall was the angels having a pillow fight. (We never did figure out what role, if any, angels supposedly played in tornadoes.) A colleague said the other day that she told her children that a big snowfall was God's way of telling you to slow down. After all, if the insurance companies call these "acts of God," we might as well give him proper credit for it. Some of these "myths" children were told, while naïve, are a harmless way to come to grips with the weather. They provide a way to make a little sense of something that disrupts our lives.

The snow is pretty as it blankets the ground and covers a lot of imperfections. It surely is a blanket of God's glory, and will provide benefits for ski resorts and spring flowers. At the same time, it creates clogged streets, commuting problems and power outages. It's hard not to look at this as a "glass-half-empty" kind of situation.

These snowstorms can bring out the worst in us. A huge snowball fight in the District of Columbia after the December blizzard resulted in a police officer brandishing a gun after the crowd pelted his Hummer with snowballs.

But the adversity can also bring out the best in us. The snowfall has brought together families to do things they haven't done for months; they played games, shared walks, sat by the fireplace and read books. Slow down, and take time to just enjoy each other. Neighbors helped each other shovel sidewalks and driveways,

teamed up to dig out cars and fire hydrants. Moms offered their children's services for snow removal online - not unlike when I was young, just via a different technology.

Some pastors picked up shovels and worked on snow removal themselves. One expressed his gratitude for four parish youths looking to earn some extra money who came by and helped out.

Pastors have been grateful for the parishioners who braved the streets and attended Mass - mostly arriving on foot - even though Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien waived the obligation if it was unsafe to get to Mass. Although companies have appreciated that the snowstorms have mostly come on weekends, so that workweeks have seen less disruption, our parishes have seen greater impact. Along with everyone else, they have had to pay for more snow removal than budgeted, and with fewer parishioners in the pews on several weekends, parish collections have taken a hit. The Archbishop's Annual Appeal weekend, essential to supporting a host of agencies and charitable programs, scheduled for Feb. 6-7, has been postponed one week because of the weather.

In practicing stewardship, it is essential to provide sustainable support for our parishes, which includes our presence at Mass and in ministry, in addition to our financial assistance. Church law acknowledges that the safety of the faithful can be taken into account when it comes to the weather and Sunday obligation. But we need to make sure that financial support continues even when we cannot be present. That's why monthly electronic donation programs, such as Faith Direct, can be great aids to help people keep their stewardship commitment and help their parishes stay on budget.

The storms can help bring out the best in us; part of that is working together with our neighbors and part of that is helping the people who are counting on us.