

Winter Church Advisory

A day in the life of a church is not for the faint of heart! Employees and volunteers are faced with managing multiple programs and services on a regular basis. Often, it feels a lot like a juggling act. On any given day, you may find the food pantry has a delivery; there's a ladies' luncheon in the afternoon then a Jazzercise class; oh, and we forgot to mention the nursery school has parent pick up at the side door. The local AA chapter has a meeting in the Great Hall at the same time the choir is practicing in the Sanctuary, and there's a youth ministry activity after Jazzercise. This schedule may be difficult to manage for most people, but probably not for our readers.

Churches are the unsung heroes that make everyone's faith world go 'round. Without them, none of these programs would exist and only a fraction of God's ministries would occur. Just when you think you've got the schedule down, you receive a publication from your insurance program reminding you that winter is coming and you need to be concerned about frozen pipes and ice dams! Oh, and when is the last time you've had the plumbing inspected? Now you're wondering when you'll find the time to meet with the maintenance person to discuss these issues while still coordinating the Advent activities, Sunday worship and the pancake breakfast.

Although it may feel overwhelming to add one more thing, it is critical to remember that "one more thing" is what will preserve these activities and ensure your ministries aren't interrupted from the devastation of a burst pipe or rapid thaw. Just like a church appoints committees for a pancake breakfast, having a Winter Inspection Committee will help preserve your ministry, especially during severe weather events. Severe weather may initiate a chain of events resulting in significant damage. Make sure the Winter Inspection Committee inspects your church, especially in preparation for an upcoming storm.

- **Heavy Rain** – may reveal small leaks, especially when roof drains are blocked. Damage may begin to appear on ceilings near roof valleys and corresponding drains. It's time to call the roofer.
- **Heavy Snow** – may result in snow accumulation that exceeds the roof's snow load. These situations require immediate removal of snow to prevent collapse. Warning signs include: sagging of suspended ceilings, ceiling cracks, and bowing. The building will be dangerous.
- **Heavy Winds** – open vents and design defects permit snow or rain to be blown into a building without damaging the exterior. When the snow melts, interior damage occurs. Look around steeples and belfries that are open.
- **Power Loss** – there is no assurance that systems will resume properly. In severe cold, oil in boilers becomes gelatinous and may not properly flow. It's a good practice to turn off electrical equipment during an outage to protect it from a surge when power is resumed; surge protection is better. Be sure normal heating has resumed when the power returns.
- **Flooding** – not covered by many insurance policies unless bought separately. General flooding means rapid run-off. Response plans are needed.
- **Severe Cold Below Normal** – pipes near building exteriors or interior drafts which have never frozen may do so when the cold is more severe and prolonged than usual. Regular building inspections are essential to detect pipe breaks. Allowing a little water drip can prevent freezing.
- **Ice Build-up** – typically on roofs when there is heat loss from below. The melted water under the ice will find its way into the building eventually. Replacing a bit of attic insulation can minimize this. Large icicles also pose a hazard to pedestrians walking below.
- **Rapid Thawing** – may result either in rapid run-off or flooding/ponding. On flat roofs or near buildings, thawing may result in interior water damage. Add heavy rain to accumulated snow, and collapse may soon follow. Warm days followed by cold nights result in icy sidewalks and parking lots. If you must stack snow near sidewalks or parking areas, be sure to do so on the downhill side so that water flows away from pedestrian traffic.