



## A Tornado in the Bathroom

A tornado hit just north of Joppatowne, MD, leaving in its wake reports of wind damage and fallen trees. The storm brought with it dime-sized hail, and many residents were left without electricity until the following morning.

The Rev. Janice Gordon-Barnes is the Priest-in-Charge of the Church of the Resurrection in Copley Parish – Gunpowder Hundred in Joppa, MD. She was recently caught at her parish during the tornado and wrote the following story about that experience.

### LESSON: HAVE A WORKING SAFE

On Sunday June 12, 2011 a tornado warning went out to residents in Harford County, Maryland. It was about 4:30 in the afternoon and I was still at church, so I contemplated my next move. A safe place without windows? The only room in the entire church without windows was the ladies' bathroom. Good. I went to my office, turned off the computer, picked up the things I thought were most important and headed for my "safe room."

On the way I thought "important documents" ... like the marriage register, the baptismal register, the confirmation register and the communicant register. So I raced into my secretary's office – as the sky grew darker and darker, and the wind howled for all its worth – grabbed as many sacred documents as I could and went back and forth to the bathroom until I thought the most important ones were safe.

Then the Rector's Warden called and said to come over to his house and shelter in the basement with him and his wife. "No time!" I said. "Plenty of time" he responded. So I staggered out to the car clutching all the heavy register



### Biography



The Rev. Janice Gordon-Barnes is Priest-in-Charge of Copley Parish Gunpowder Hundred, Church of the Resurrection in Joppa, Maryland — Episcopal Diocese of Maryland



### Fast Facts



**CONGREGATION:**  
Church of the Resurrection,  
Copley Parish Gunpowder  
Hundred in Joppa, MD

**LOCATION:**  
Diocese of Maryland

**CONGREGATION SIZE:**  
Avg. 120

**DISASTER:**  
Urban tornado



books in my over-filled arms, set off for his house but before I had gone two blocks I saw the trees heaving and bending, and the rain slashed against my windshield and ... quite frankly I was terrified. So I made a U-turn, raced back to the church, wrestled all the register books out of the car and, fighting the wind, managed to get safely back into the church.

Then, down the hall, across the fellowship hall, and finally – back into the ladies' bathroom. I collapsed on the floor on top of all the books and thought "Now what?" Do I wait until it hits? Will I know when it's about to hit and suck everything around me into the Gunpowder River?

The sky grew darker; I felt my anxiety level rise; the wind grew louder and LOUDER. Then the light bulb went off – I was a priest; I was in church; so of course prayer was definitely the order of the day. Except my mind was skittering around so much with thoughts of Armageddon, that I could not stay present in the presence of God. I did the next best thing; I sang hymns! There, in the ladies bathroom of Copley Parish Gunpowder Hundred Church of the Resurrection I sang all the Christmas, Advent and Easter hymns I could remember, very loudly and very much off-key.

The tornado hit ... in the community just north of Joppatowne. The wind died down, the sky became clear and I started the journey of once more ferrying all the register books back to my secretary's office.

The moral of this story? Please make sure you have a working safe where – in the event of an emergency – all the important documents of your parish can be stored. Such a seemingly small thing will be of infinite value to your church ... and will save your arm muscles from becoming very sore the day after.

## What to do Before a Tornado:



What FEMA says:

- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio or to commercial radio or television newscasts for the latest information.
- Look for approaching storms
- Look for the following danger signs:
  - Dark, often greenish sky
  - Large hail
  - A large, dark, low-lying cloud (particularly if rotating)
  - Loud roar, similar to a freight train.
- If you see approaching storms or any of the danger signs, be prepared to take shelter immediately.

## Additional Resources



For more tips and lessons learned, please see the following online resources:

- "Setting Up Communications During Disasters"

Share your own disaster response stories or tips to help a community in need at [www.episcopalrelief.org](http://www.episcopalrelief.org)