



St. Mary's Parish members aboard bus stalled on Pennsylvania Turnpike for hours

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Mary Ann Morris of Alton has made the trek to Washington, D.C., for the March for Life for more than two decades, but never has she experienced a situation like she is in today.

Morris and seven others from **St. Mary's Parish** in Alton and about 50 people from the local Catholic Diocese, sat for hours on a bus on the Pennsylvania Turnpike until Saturday night. The bus was attempting to beat the storm but was stopped by a traffic-backup Friday night due to an accident.

At 9:45 p.m. on Saturday, RiverBender.com received word from Morris that after 24.5 hours, the bus was finally moving.

"They took out some of the concrete barriers and we are headed back to Bedford, Pennsylvania, to Bedford High School for shelter until we can leave in the morning after they have cleared the routes," Morris said. "The National Guard brought us some military rations for food."

Morris responded again at 8:20 a.m. on Sunday and said her group finally left Bedford. She said the Pennsylvania Turnpike was still closed, so the bus was taking a different route home.

"The Red Cross put us up at the high school along with four buses that were part of the Missouri Life Caravan," Morris said. "The cot was wonderful! We had Mass in an auditorium with the Missouri Caravan's priest. We had bagged lunch and sunny skies now are our company as God brings his life warriors in the Illinois Life Caravan home."

The winter storm that blasted the Eastern portion of the country has had a huge impact on some members of St. Mary's Church Parish in Alton and some other Belleville Catholic Diocese members.

"This was my 24th year of making the trip and the first time anything like this has happened," Morris said. "We were at mile marker 134 heading southwest on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and stalled aboard our charter bus. Everything is snow-covered. We have two feet of snow here. We were probably only a couple hours into our trip when we had to stop."

Morris and the others didn't think they would have problems getting to and from Washington, D.C. They left Thursday morning and the severe weather issues kept getting pushed up in time. The group participated in the march and headed back at about 4 p.m. Friday. The group marched at 1 p.m. in the streets of Washington, D.C., and more than 250,000 people participated, even with the snow coming, Morris said.

"There were a lot of dedicated people there," she said. "There were so many high school age and younger people there. We were very inspired by them. There was a Mass and 20,000 kids were at that location."

The March for Life is an annual pro-life rally protesting abortion, held in Washington, D. C., on or around the anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the case *Roe vs. Wade*.

Tom Grossheim, another of the travelers stranded on Morris' bus, said, "It's kind of crazy being stuck out here, but it can be part of the deal. It's never an easy trip. There's goodness to be found out even in the midst of this blizzard. People come together to help each other out."

The St. Mary's members are patiently waiting for the turnpike to be cleared and for them to be able to move ahead back to Alton. Morris said the group has had plenty of food and water and has a bathroom aboard the bus, which is a great convenience under these circumstances.

The engine of the charter bus that St. Mary's members are on has been running since the stall occurred, so everyone aboard has remained warm. Local fire department officials have brought out water and the National Guard is out assisting in the situation, bringing in food supplies to those stranded.

Highway Department workers and National Guard team members are clearing what they can of the turnpike road, but because of the wind, it is a slow process and they can't keep the snow from blowing it over, Morris said. The backup on the turnpike stretches many miles, and Morris said their group is more in the front end of those stranded.

"We hope by morning to be moving ahead, but we don't know right now," she said early Saturday evening. "It is a 21-hour trip and we didn't make it very far being stranded here."

Don Williams is traveling with Morris and the others. He said this is his second year of coming, but it is worth it, despite the problems they are having on this trip.

"It's what I believe in," he said of support the March For Life group. "It is a big fight to get it dropped. We need to keep the push on."

