



# Never Forget: Remembering 9/11

## 9/11: Faith and fear at forefront of a day that changed our world

*(Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, then a priest of the Archdiocese of Louisville, offered a remembrance of Sept. 11, 2001, how he and others reacted to that day's tragedies, and how people's lives and faith have been affected since.)*



I was traveling on a bus with senior citizens from St. Augustine Parish in Lebanon, Ky., to Saint Meinrad Archabbey/Seminary in southern Indiana when we learned of the terrorist attacks that morning.

At first, we were stunned. It seemed unreal. Upon our returning to Lebanon that night, I learned that the two priests living with me had held a prayer service earlier in the evening.

My recollection is that, as is common with major crisis events, some people responded in faith while others reacted in fear.

The Church was quite full that following weekend. We were especially concerned about the children, being particularly present in the school. The response of faith was evident in people joining together in prayer, especially at Mass, in outreach and support. The reaction of fear was noticed in various forms of panic, suspicion and withdrawal.

Overall, it seems that the events of Sept. 11, 2001, caused people to re-evaluate what was most important in their lives; namely, God, family and friends. It also caused people to feel more vulnerable which, consequently, rapidly increased security measures in travel and a variety of ways. Our world was changed, and our way of living was altered.

The Church played a key role in helping people to overcome their fear, panic, anxiety, depression, sadness and uncertainties. Unfortunately, however, this was just months before the sex abuse of minors in the Church would become such a public scandal and reverberate throughout the world for decades to come.

The key to surviving any crisis, like 9/11, is not to lose hope. As people of faith, our hope is in God. Jesus Christ is our hope and salvation.

In many ways, practically every facet of religion and society has increasingly become polarized beyond any other time in history. Some might wonder if the events of 9/11 had a greater degree of impact than we might realize on this phenomenon. It should all remind us of the need to remain rooted in prayer, faith and mutual respect rather than to succumb to the destructive consequences of fear, suspicion and hate.

As Pope Francis exhorts us time and again, even when there is disagreement, we must never tire of accompaniment, dialogue, encounter and mercy.

For Catholics, that rootedness is ultimately realized and sustained in remaining steadfast in the word of God and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist.

In essence, we are at our best when we strive to be Christ-centered rather than self-centered or agenda-driven. †

### Inside this special supplement:

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(CNS photo/Chris Sheridan)

# Archdiocesan pilgrims found hope amid terror on Sept. 11, 2001

By Sean Gallagher

Around noon on Sept. 11, 2001, Father Patrick Beidelman celebrated Mass on the top floor of a hotel in New Jersey across the East River from Manhattan.

It was just a few hours after terrorist attacks took the lives of 2,606 people in the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center.



Father Patrick Beidelman

As Father Beidelman led 35 pilgrims from the archdiocese in prayer who were supposed to have left the previous day for a pilgrimage to Austria and Germany, he looked out toward Manhattan

and could see an enormous plume of smoke rising from the site of the World Trade Center, which has since become known as ground zero.

Then he sought to share in his homily a message of hope and meaning on a day of unimaginable terror.

“As we gather this day, we make a pilgrimage now into the heart. We ask God to touch our hearts and minds and to be with those who have died, those who are suffering, ... those who are worried about family members and those who are grieving the loss of loved ones,” said Father Beidelman, as reported in the Sept. 21, 2001, issue of *The Criterion*.

“For a variety of reasons, we’ve all been led here, and we gather around this table—now an altar of the Lord—and the Lord invites us to make a pilgrimage into the heart, a pilgrimage of prayer, a pilgrimage of sadness and a pilgrimage that trusts in God’s salvation.”

Twenty years after that fateful day, Father Beidelman can only look to God for the reason why he was able to share such a reassuring message.

“I’m amazed at the grace that I was given at that time to find the words to say something encouraging that connected

faith to that moment,” said Father Beidelman in a recent interview with *The Criterion*. “It felt very chaotic and disorienting. I’m just surprised, knowing how much uncertainty there was in our minds during that time, that God gave me the grace to say something encouraging.”

What’s even more amazing is that Father Beidelman, in 2001 a priest for just three years, only learned on Sept. 8 that he was going to serve as the chaplain for the pilgrimage.

Msgr. Joseph Schaedel, then archdiocesan vicar general, was supposed to have been the chaplain for the pilgrimage. But his father had died in the week before it was to begin.

On the weekend before the pilgrimage, Msgr. William Stumpf, then archdiocesan vicar for clergy, called Father Beidelman to see if he could fill in as chaplain. At the time, Father Beidelman was serving as pastor of St. Michael Parish in Brookville and the former Holy Guardian Angels Parish in Cedar Grove.

Father Beidelman looks back on the events of 20 years ago and is grateful that divine providence helped him “be available for how God needed me and all of us, really, to come to him in prayer and be connected to him, especially through the Mass.”

Carolyn Noone, archdiocesan special events coordinator at the time, had planned the pilgrimage to leave for Europe on Sept. 10.



Carolyn Noone

But bad weather and a construction fire at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, N.J., delayed the pilgrims’ departure from Indianapolis long enough that their flight for Europe took off before they arrived in New Jersey.

So, they found lodging late on Sept. 10 in a hotel across the East River from midtown Manhattan. When Noone woke up on Sept. 11 and saw on television the towers of the World Trade Center on fire, she said to her husband, “ ‘John, is this a movie that we have missed?’ Then we sat there and realized that it was all happening.”

She and the rest of the pilgrims were shocked like much of the rest of the world, except that they were just a few miles from ground zero.

“We didn’t know what to think,” Noone said. “We didn’t know what to do. We were just frozen. What was going to happen next? Should we be here? People were afraid to be anywhere because anything could happen.”

Art Berkemeier shared a hotel room with Father Beidelman on Sept. 10. On the morning of Sept. 11, he saw live on TV the second jetliner strike the second tower.

“Your heart sank right away,” said Berkemeier, a member of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. “You knew that the world had changed at that moment.”

While the pilgrims watched in disbelief the events of that morning, Father Beidelman knew that they needed soon to come together in



Hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 flies toward the World Trade Center twin towers before slamming into the south tower as the north one burns in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. (CNS photo from Reuters)

prayer and hastily organized a Mass.

“Everything was kind of thrown together,” he recalled. “We didn’t even have a Mass kit. I had to go out to a nearby parish and see if they would loan me the things for Mass. I took a taxi. The parish loaned me the stuff, and I came back and had the Mass for our group and another pilgrimage group from Buffalo [N.Y.]”

As Father Beidelman led the pilgrims in prayer, he experienced just how important it was that they come together for worship.

“The anchor of our ritual of prayer gave us something to do, which was the best thing we could do at that moment,” he said. “So, making sure we did it was very important and was something that we had absolute clarity about in the midst of a time of so much uncertainty. We needed to pray, to come together for Mass.”

Berkemeier was glad for the chance to pray together with his fellow pilgrims.



Art Berkemeier

“It was somber,” he recalled. “We prayed very much for the people involved. But we also prayed for our country and our own safety, not knowing the magnitude of what was happening.”

Because all commercial air travel in U.S. airspace was grounded for several days after Sept. 11, the pilgrimage to Europe came to an end before it had hardly begun. The pilgrims made their way back to Indianapolis by motorcoach.

“To put our feet on the ground at home was like, ‘We’re going to be safe. We’re here. We can’t wait to see family and get to our homes and just be safe,’” said Noone. “We were so thankful that God was protecting us and helped us get back home.”

Looking back 20 years after the

attacks on 9/11, Father Beidelman and Berkemeier recalled enduring lessons they learned that day.

“It strengthened my resolve and commitment to be ready to rise to the occasion,” said Father Beidelman. “That was kind of a premiere moment when I think God’s grace helped me to do that. Sometimes you need to set aside yourself, especially in this circumstance.”

“You learned quickly that life is not permanent,” said Berkemeier. “Life as you know it can change very, very quickly. And not just your personal life, but the life of the country. The whole atmosphere and life of the country can change that quick.”

“... We’re not in charge. God is. Why this happened, we didn’t know. You have to be prepared. You have to be ready at any moment.”

Although Noone was glad to return to Indianapolis with the other pilgrims, the shock of Sept. 11, 2001, and being so close to ground zero that day was difficult for her.

“For weeks and weeks after that, I had horrible nightmares of being trapped in a hotel on a high floor and not being able to get out,” Noone said. “I’d just wake up with terrors. I needed my faith more than ever. All of us did.”

In December 2001, Noone led another archdiocesan pilgrimage group to New York City. In addition to the city’s historic churches, the pilgrims also visited one other holy place: ground zero.

Noone recalled how a police officer who escorted the group’s motorcoach to the site instructed the pilgrims before they left the bus.

“She got on the bus and told us, ‘Do not speak. This is a place of great reverence,’” Noone said. “We went to a viewing balcony. It was overwhelming. You could not help but cry. I don’t know what words could describe it. The sorrow we had for our brethren that we had lost.” †



Rescue workers stand next to a piece of wall still standing from the fallen World Trade Center on Sept. 13, 2001, in New York, two days after the terrorist attacks. Sept. 11 this year marks the 20th anniversary of the attacks that claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 people in New York City and Shanksville, Pa., and at the Pentagon. (CNS photo/Beth Kaiser, Reuters)

## 'The ultimate calling'

## Faith and service bound together for firefighters who served at ground zero

By Sean Gallagher

Sept. 11, 2001, started as an ordinary day for Charles Glesing, at the time a firefighter in Indianapolis.

He was off duty and had dropped off his children at school when he heard news on his car radio about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

Returning home, Glesing watched coverage of the attacks on TV. When he saw the first of the twin towers collapse, he knew that he might no longer be a distant spectator of the history-making events of that day.

That was because he was a member of Indiana Task Force 1, an elite unit of people from various fields of work specially trained in urban search and rescue. The task force can be deployed at a moment's notice across the country by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"A light bulb went off in my head, 'We might be going,'" recalled Glesing, a member of Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis. "Later, the phone rang and I was told that we were activating the task force and we'd be heading to New York. I got my stuff and gear ready to go."

Traveling on a bus overnight to New York, Glesing and 64 other task force members approached Manhattan at dawn on Sept. 12, a plume of smoke still rising from the site of the World Trade Center, now commonly known as ground zero.

"It started to hit you more—the realism and severity," Glesing said. "We knew we were in for a big job here."

Two other Catholic members of the task force at that time recently spoke with *The Criterion* about their experience of working at ground zero. Of the three, one is still a member of the Indianapolis Fire Department (IFD), while two have retired.

For each of them, faith is interwoven with their work as first responders, which they experience as a kind of vocation. Seeing their service as firefighters through the eyes of faith helped them cope with the challenges of working in New York after 9/11, and leads them to find meaning in the tragedies of that day 20 years ago.

**An instinctual reaction to serve**

Tim Baughman was on duty as a firefighter on the east side of Indianapolis on Sept. 11, 2001.

A member of the task force, he learned later that day that he was going to New

York. He met his wife as she was picking up their children from school.

"She just looked at me and said, 'I've got this. Go,'" recalled Baughman, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis, who now works as the senior director for track safety and medical services for the NTT IndyCar Series.

In recent years, Baughman has learned from his children, who are now adults, of their fears for their father on Sept. 11, 2001—feelings they kept to themselves that day.

"I probably wouldn't have gone if I had known how they felt at the time," he said. "Sometimes, I reflect back on that and you think it's kind of selfish. These little kids were afraid and their dad just said, 'Hey, I'm going.'"

But Baughman's family had gotten used to his instinctual call to serve.

"I don't see an accident without stopping," he said. "If my family and I are sitting in a restaurant and I see someone choking or having a problem, I immediately go. My kids say, 'When are you going to stop being this way?' I say, 'I probably won't ever.'"

So, when it became clear quickly that thousands died in the terrorist attacks in New York, Baughman didn't think twice about going into harm's way with the task force.

"We literally walked into a cloud of dust," Baughman said. "It was like walking in and out of a cloud."

Baughman's job in the task force in 2001 was to oversee efforts to keep his fellow members safe in their work. To aid him in that work, he went up about 100 feet above ground zero on a fire truck ladder to get a perspective on the scene.

"It gave a feeling of how immense it was," he said. "And that was just the pile [of rubble where the twin towers had stood]. There were buildings all the way around it that were also impacted."

There were thousands of people from across the country working at the site, hoping to rescue survivors but increasingly resigned to the fact that the mission would be more of recovering the remains of those who had died.

"We didn't rescue anyone," said Baughman. "We went to the biggest [search and rescue] incident that has ever happened to date in this country. But we didn't rescue anyone. That was tough. It was tough."

When the task force returned to



Charles Glesing, left, Tim Baughman and Dave Cook pose on Aug. 25 at the Indiana 9/11 Memorial in Indianapolis. All three were members of Indiana Task Force 1, an elite urban search and rescue team deployed to ground zero in New York City less than a day after terrorist attacks destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. They are touching a steel beam taken from the rubble of ground zero. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Indiana after about 10 days of work at ground zero, they received a hero's welcome—something that didn't sit well with Baughman.

"I felt embarrassed," he recalled. "We didn't save any lives, but we were being celebrated."

**'An immediate reverence'**

Saving the lives of people in danger is at the heart of the mission of a firefighter. That mission takes on greater urgency when it's the lives of other firefighters that are threatened.

On Sept. 11, 2001, 343 members of the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) died after rushing to the World Trade Center when so many other were fleeing the famed twin towers.

Baughman recalled what happened at ground zero when the remains of a firefighter were found.

"Every time they would find a firefighter, work would stop and they would blow horns," he said. "They'd call the firefighters to line up and bring the remains out on a stretcher. There was an immediate reverence that would take place. That happened several times while we were there."

As it happened again and again, it led Dave Cook, a member of Indiana Task Force 1, to reflect on the meaning of sacrifice in his life and work.

"You begin to think, 'What if this was me?'" said Cook, a member of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis now serving as an IFD battalion chief. "You think about their families and the children. Their dad went to work and that was the last time they saw him. It begins to affect you that way, because then I thought about my own family."

"To this day, every time that [my family and I] see each other or say goodbye, we're all hugging each other."

The sacrifice of first responders on 9/11 has continued in the 20 years since the day of the attacks.

Many of those who did search and rescue work at ground zero have developed illnesses related to exposure to various toxins in the atmosphere around the site. Some have died.

That includes four members of Indiana Task Force 1 who served at ground zero, according to Thomas Neal, the current coordinator for the task force. Some 40% of

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## Indy firefighter new on the job on 9/11 integrates work and faith

By Sean Gallagher

Thomas McKiernan was on his second day on the job as a firefighter in Indianapolis when the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, occurred.

On that day, 343 firefighters died in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City.

Yet the enormous sacrifice and loss experienced by his brother firefighters in New York never led



Indianapolis Fire Department firefighter Thomas McKiernan sits on Aug. 25 on the bumper of a fire engine in Station 25 in Indianapolis. McKiernan was on his second day on the job as a firefighter on Sept. 11, 2001. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

McKiernan to question the career he had just entered.

"It gave me the sense that this was absolutely what I wanted to do," said McKiernan, 43, a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis. "I had a sense of duty that I was going to carry on what they left at ground zero."

This dedication to service and self-sacrifice was instilled in him as he grew up in Cincinnati as the son of a police officer and hospital nurse.

"Firemen aren't just made in the academy," McKiernan said. "They're made before ever getting hired. There's a sense of service, duty and love for their fellow man, a desire to serve others—that's how I was brought up. So, I was halfway a firefighter before I ever got hired. I could never walk away from it. No way."

He also recalled sage advice from a retired Fire Department of the City of New York firefighter who taught at the University of Cincinnati, where McKiernan had majored in fire science. The instructor told him, "If I walked into a shift one night and I met my guardian angel, and he said, 'You're going to die tonight,' I would say, 'OK. What's for dinner?'" McKiernan said.

As the years have gone on after 9/11, McKiernan has integrated more and more his Catholic faith with his work as a firefighter for the Indianapolis Fire Department, trying to see Christ in everyone he serves.

"We meet all sorts of people, but usually on the worst day of their lives," McKiernan said. "It's easy to find Christ, say, in a single mom whose car has caught on fire and now she doesn't have any way to get to work. It's harder to find Christ in, say, the guy who's overdosed for the fourth time this month and won't do anything about his addiction."

"You really have to delve into your faith to find Christ in everyone. And I strive very hard to treat everyone with the dignity that God demands that we treat all of his creation."

At the same time, this interweaving of his faith and his work has helped him live out more fully his vocation as a husband, father of seven children and Benedictine oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, dedicating himself to praying the Liturgy of the Hours and reading from the *Rule* of St. Benedict daily.

"I have learned to put a lot of trust in Christ," McKiernan said. "The department trains us very well. But there have been times when I'm crawling down blind through a smoke-filled, incredibly hot hallway in a house, and I'm doing what I've been trained to do, but I'm also saying, 'Jesus, I trust in you.'"

"If I can trust Jesus in that moment, I can trust Jesus when it comes to complications in a pregnancy with my wife, or dealing with my son's latest attitude problem. My job has made me trust Christ all the more."

Twenty years after he was a newly minted firefighter on Sept. 11, 2001, McKiernan keeps lessons he learned that day in his heart and mind.

"No matter what, we can always come together," he said. "We have a common factor in that we're human. Whatever walk of life we have, we have the ability to console and support each other."

"We've learned each other's humanity a lot. But now we're losing that again and we need to be reminded that all of us are human. All of us hurt. All of us love. And we just need to stop, listen to each other and realize the humanity in each person again." †

# 'We were no longer strangers, we were all children of God who came together'

## Sept. 11, 2001: A time of terror, faith, heartbreak—and the unity we once knew in the United States

*(Editor's note: Readers of The Criterion have shared their thoughts and memories of Sept. 11, 2001, creating an emotional perspective of how that tragic day in American history touched their lives and their faith then—and continues to influence their lives and faith today.)*

By John Shaughnessy

Judy Davis-Fuller screamed in horror on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

By the end of that emotionally overwhelming day, the feeling of devastation was still there from watching terrorists deliberately crash two planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. But that terror was also touched by a solidarity, a strength and a single purpose that bonded strangers in a way that Davis-Fuller will never forget, and that still guides her life.

A member of St. Michael Parish in Greenfield, Davis-Fuller was enjoying being part of a family reunion on a Georgia beach on that tragic morning.

"I had turned on the TV to watch the news while preparing breakfast and shortly heard the news about the first plane hitting one of the towers," she recalls. "I must have screamed because suddenly, everyone else was in the kitchen and dining room area watching with me in disbelief and horror.

"Cameras were now trained on the smoke billowing out of the first tower. We could see people actually jumping to their death to escape the fire from the jet fuel. Then we again watched in horror as a second plane intentionally flew into the second tower. We were so stunned that at first no one could say anything except, 'Oh, dear God!'"

During the course of the day, terrorists also hijacked



An American flag hangs from a building near the base of one of the World Trade Center twin towers in New York, on September 16, 2001. The World Trade Center collapsed after being hit by hijacked airplanes on September 11, 2001. (REUTERS/Shawn Best)

and crashed another plane into the Pentagon. Then another plane—Flight 93—crashed in a field in western Pennsylvania. That plane had also been taken over by terrorists and was believed to be headed toward the White House or the U.S. Capitol until passengers joined together to stop that plan.

Overwhelmed by the news, Davis-Fuller and other family members retreated to the beach, trying to make sense of "what was happening in our country."

"Evidently there were many more who had the same idea," she recalls. "Perfect strangers gathered together on the beach to share thoughts, share comfort. We were no longer strangers, we were all children of God who came together to discuss the event and to pray together."

"I was already a believer, but that horrendous event strengthened my belief even more when strangers gathered together to pray for a single cause—to pray for those who lost their lives that day and to pray for those firefighters and other first responders who were frantically working, putting their own lives on the line, to save those who were buried in the rubble when the towers both fell."

Twenty years later, one special thought is forever etched in her mind.

"The United States of America was forever changed on that day," she says. "People from all walks of life, all religions, all races and nationalities came together as one under God's protection."

"I no longer take anything for granted. I thank God every morning for getting me safely through the night, for all the blessings he has given me, and for giving me a new day to try to become a better Christian."

### 'Christ was present'

The heartbreak and reverence still fill Rick Pohlman as the retired Indianapolis firefighter shares his memories of rushing to New York City to try to rescue people from the buried rubble of the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

He still remembers the adrenaline of traveling through the night of Sept. 11, 2001, as a member of the Indiana Task Force 1.

He still recalls the haunting, gut-churning feeling of seeing "the pile" for the first time—and how he said a prayer and made an examination of conscience as he tried to make his way through 16 acres of collapsed concrete, including the "widow makers," the name given to the debris hanging from surrounding buildings that posed extreme hazards to everyone working the pile.

He also remembers the emotion of passing the Catholic church where New York firefighters took the body of Franciscan Father Mychal Judge, the chaplain of the Fire Department of New York who initially prayed over dead bodies in the streets on the morning of 9/11 before rushing to provide aid and prayers to people in the North Tower. There, he and others were killed by falling debris from the South Tower.

And Pohlman will never forget the impact that all those scenes and experiences have had on his Catholic faith then and still now.



Rick Pohlman working at the site of ground zero in New York City after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. (Submitted photo)

"Frequently while responding to difficult situations, you would acknowledge to yourself that what you were about to experience could end badly," says Pohlman, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis. "Usually, that would invoke a short prayer and perhaps an act of contrition or examination of conscience."

He turned to his faith often at "ground zero." "The rubble pile was [more than] five stories tall with massive spires still standing," he recalls. "Fires would erupt without warning from the flammable liquids in vehicles parked in the below-ground garages. On one search operation, we had a squad in a void area when one of these fires erupted. Luckily, we only sustained minor casualties with a few second-degree burns. Again, a gut check and a few prayers of thanksgiving."

There were also the moments of thanks that Pohlman and the other rescue-and-recovery workers received. "Each day approaching the pile, we were greeted by people lining the streets cheering us on and thanking us for our assistance," he says. "Early on, there was still hope of finding survivors. Later in the week, it became less likely, and efforts were shifted to respectful recovery of those who perished."

A feeling of heartbreak and reverence set in during those efforts. In the midst of that time, the power of the Eucharist and the presence of Christ touched Pohlman deeply in a moment he never expected.

"On Sunday, Sept. 16, I was working the pile. I had lost track of the days at that point until I saw a priest at the edge of the pile just across from Fire Station 10. The priest was distributing Communion to the workers. I was brought to tears as I received the Eucharist from this priest."

"I cannot convey the range of thoughts and emotions of receiving the Eucharist in the midst of such utter devastation. Somehow, Christ was present in the midst of all of that, through the efforts of a priest who saw the need to minister to those working the pile. This was even more poignant remembering Father Mychal, who had given his life ministering to others in the middle of the chaos."

### A time of death—and life

In many ways, the story of Sept. 11, 2001, can be framed in terms of the nearly 3,000 Americans who died in the terrorist attacks.

They were husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers and friends. And the impact of their deaths on the people they loved and the people who loved them was devastating—and has continued in different emotional ways in the 20 years since then.

In the midst of the heartbreak of that tragedy—and the fear and uncertainty that gripped the United States at that time—Christa Bunch's main focus was on life. She was five months pregnant with her and her husband's first child.

As Bunch watched the news coverage of the planes flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, the former airline flight attendant knew the crashes were intentional. She and her husband Eric—an airline mechanic—knew enough about flying to know when planes were "being off pattern versus flying into a building."

As she continued to watch the news coverage in the following days, she hoped for miracles, that lives could be rescued from the rubble that entombed so many, never sensing that her own child would soon be struggling to live.

Two months later, on Nov. 14, Bunch went to visit her doctor for her monthly checkup when it was determined she was already going into labor at just 26 weeks of being pregnant. Her doctor immediately sent Bunch across the street to a hospital. There, for the next two weeks, every effort was made to get the labor to stop.

"It was successful at first and then, like the flip of a switch, I went into unstoppable labor," recalls Bunch, a member of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis.

She was rushed into an operating room for an emergency cesarean section that led to the delivery of Maxwell Warner Bunch, their 2-pound, 12-ounce, 15-inch-long son.

"He was bruised from head to toe because he was still so far up inside me," she recalls. "It took everything to get him out."

As Max remained in the hospital into December, his life once again hung in the balance.

"We received a call late one night that Max had stopped breathing, and they needed to send him to Riley Children's Hospital for further evaluation," his mother says.

Max pulled through again and finally came home to his parents on January 18, 2002, three weeks before his actual due date of Feb. 12.

"With only minor setbacks over the first couple of years, Max has turned into a healthy, thriving, 6-foot, 2-inch,



Christa Bunch and her husband Eric admire their son, Maxwell, shortly after his birth in 2001. (Submitted photo)

20-year-old young man," says Bunch about her son who recently began his college education at Ball State University.

"I could never reason in my head why any of it happened the way it did, but the one thing I knew is that God had him in his protective hands from day one and has never let him go.

"On 9/11, almost 3,000 lost their lives. I often think of Max as being God's way to carry on the life of one person lost on 9/11."

### 'We became more aware of our need for each other'

The sinking feeling hit James Welter in waves. It came first as he watched the tragedy of 9/11 unfold on a small television and saw the heartbreak of lives lost and families devastated as "powerful symbols of our culture crumbled before our eyes."

The second wave struck Welter as the U.S. government ordered that "all airplanes are to land immediately, and all flights are canceled."

"My wife was overseas, maybe even in the air on the way home," recalls Welter, a member of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis. "I raced home to check her itinerary in a frantic attempt to determine her location."

"In one of those grace-filled moments, the phone rang five minutes after I arrived at the house: My wife Helen was safe, but she was stranded in Rome and did not know when she would be able to return. For another eight agonizing days, I struggled to get airline information and waited for her e-mails."

"I was not alone in my fear and anxiety. People came to church in great numbers in the days and weeks following the attack, as we all experienced a new closeness with



A rescue helicopter surveys damage to the Pentagon after a hijacked airliner slammed into one of its five sides, killing scores on Sept. 11, 2001. Two other planes crashed into the World Trade Center and one crashed in Pennsylvania. (CNS photo from Reuters)

family and friends. We became more aware of our need for each other. We recognized our dependence on God. And we came to terms with our own mortality and saw the fragility of life."

At the time, Welter was about a year into an online, faith-sharing ministry that he had started at St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis—sending his reflections of faith by e-mail.

"In my daily reflections, I reminded folks that none of those final phone calls from the towers and from Flight 93 were to check on the stock market or to see if a business deal got closed. They were about the important things in life—they were about relationships."

Welter shared one of his reflections from that time. It included this thought:

"Our illusions of security and safety are shattered, our innocence gone. We know now that our lives are not our own. We do not possess life. It comes through us, but it is not from us."

"Under the ashes, there is no race. Under the ashes, there are no differences. Under the ashes, we see life as the gift that it truly is."

"Under the ashes, we are one."

### Keeping the faith

The day began for Alexander Fay with a quick walk across the street from his family's home to his eighth-grade classroom at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Indianapolis.

## Life's haunting question and God's healing answer

By John Shaughnessy

The question is a haunting one, echoing through the ages whenever tragedy strikes.



Emily Trinkle

Emily Trinkle was among the many people who asked the question again on Sept. 11, 2001—as she watched the televised replays of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City falling from

the sky and crushing the lives of so many people, so many families.

"How can I have faith in a God

who allows this to happen?" she found herself thinking.

Yet just as quickly, she says, her thoughts turned to another question, "How can I afford not to?"

In the days that followed the horror of the terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 Americans, Trinkle found herself "watching for and acknowledging" signs of God at work amid the tragedy.

Her initial list included the sight of two metal beams in the debris forming a cross, and the reality that St. Paul's Chapel, directly across the street from the World Trade Center, suffered no physical damage, not even a broken pane of glass.

There was also the story of the heroics of Franciscan Father Mychal Judge, the chaplain of the Fire Department of New York—how he

initially prayed over dead bodies in the streets on the morning of 9/11, and then rushed to provide aid and prayers to people in the North Tower, where he and others were killed by falling debris from the South Tower.

At every turn, Trinkle learned of more heroes, including the passengers on Flight 93 who joined together to stop the terrorist plan to crash another plane into the White House or U.S. Capitol Building, and all the volunteers from across the country who rushed to New York to help.

"There were other things, if people stopped and recognized them," says Trinkle, a former resident of New York City who is now a member of St. Mary Parish in New Albany, where she is also a program director for St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities.

"Phone calls from inside the towers getting through the clogged lines so people could say a final goodbye to wives and parents and kids."

"The man who had a fight with his teen daughter causing him to be late for work in the World Trade Center."

"People missing flights or subways or carpool rides and therefore not being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"The countless stories of strangers helping each other out of the debris of the collapsing buildings."

For Trinkle, they all add up as evidence of God's presence—of his providence amid the tragedy and the heartbreak. "His signs are there big and small," she says. "9/11 has taught me to stop and look for the small ones, to recognize them and to appreciate them." †

# READERS

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Later that morning, he and his classmates were taking the I-Step exam when the news started to spread through the school about the terrorist attacks.

Suddenly, Sept. 11, 2001—a day he remembers as being “clear, mild and non-humid”—also became a day he has never forgotten because of the impact it has continued to have on his faith.



Alexander Fay

“I have so many memories of 9/11 and the days and weeks that followed,” Fay says. “So much can be said of President [George W.] Bush and our nation’s rallying response to the attacks. I truly miss that one, united America. However, for me, so much more can be said with how our faith community responded.”

He remembers how then-pastor Father Jeffrey Godecker invited the students into the parish church and “provided words of comfort and strength.” And he recalls the priest having the same impact on parishioners in a Mass that evening.

“I didn’t know it at the time, but 20 years later I recognize that my Catholic faith is always there and like a rock,” Fay says. “Whenever I am fueled with anger or emotion, or whenever I consider political issues and form an opinion, my faith keeps me in check, and I always consider what the Church teaches. It is a balancing mechanism for me.

“On that day and the months that followed, while I was upset and became stronger in patriotism, my faith kept me balanced. I didn’t know at the time how it would help me in the future.”

Now, he does.

“Today, when I consider issues such as immigration, abortion, poverty and health care, for example, the Catholic faith keeps me in check with my opinions and beliefs. Sometimes it is a gut punch, but it is with tough love, and I am reminded that these are not political issues.

“Sept. 11 taught me not only to turn to faith during times of tragedy and sadness, but to keep the faith during all times.”

## ‘We were turning to God’

When Jeff Ferland played “America, the Beautiful” on this past July 4 at St. Christopher Church in Indianapolis, his tears flowed.

In fact, Ferland says that he has cried every time he has played that song in the past 20 years, because it takes him back to some unforgettable moments on Sept. 11, 2001.

That was the day he rushed to phone his sister, who flew at least four times a week from Newark Liberty



Mija Quigley of Princeton Junction, N.J., leans on an engraving of the name of her son Patrick Quigley, who died in the 9/11 attack, during a 2013 ceremony marking the 12th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The 2001 terrorist attacks claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 people in New York City, Shanksville, Pa., and at the Pentagon. (CNS photo/Chris Pedota, pool via Reuters)

International Airport in New Jersey for her job. Hearing her voice and her decision to delay her trip that morning, he sighed with relief before focusing again on helping to calm the children in his music classes at St. Monica School in Indianapolis.

Then at Ferland’s lunch period that day, the parish’s pastor at the time—Msgr. Paul Koetter—told him he wanted to share a Mass for everyone touched by the tragedy, and he asked Ferland to play the music.



Jeff Ferland

“It was during that Mass that the truth hit me hard,” Ferland recalls. “The church was packed—like Christmas or Easter—but there was no friendly banter that would usually precede the Mass. We were all in what seemed like a coma, and we were turning to God, the Father, to ease our pain.

“We wanted some kind of answer for this terrible terrorist attack, and we were relying on our faith to help us find those answers. The fact that we were able to join together, and that we could do so in the presence of our Creator, brought some comfort.”

Choosing “America, the Beautiful” for the closing hymn, Ferland was stunned by what he heard after he announced the song and played the introduction.

“It was within the first few words that my voice was joined by what seemed to be thousands of angels,” he notes. “I am sure that the roof of the church was lifted up! We were all joined in music, praising God. I thank God all the time for his gift to me of music, and that I had been able to bring as much calmness in that time of violent events as my music could.

“God has changed a lot of things in our lives since that day, but I always know that I can turn to God to restore that calmness.

“To this day, I tear up whenever I play or sing ‘America, the Beautiful,’ remembering that Mass.”

*(Readers of The Criterion shared an overwhelming number of responses to our request for their thoughts and memories of how 9/11 has had an impact on their lives and faith, then and now. While space concerns limited us from including all our readers’ contributions, we appreciate every one—and we appreciate all of our readers.) †*

## Singing at the funeral Masses of 9/11 victims gave my voice a vocation

By Ann Margaret Lewis

While many images come to mind for 9/11, the most poignant for me was a funeral Mass, one of many I’d sung at the parish of St. Margaret of Cortona in the Bronx.



Ann Margaret Lewis

As the casket was led into the church surrounded by firefighters as pall bearers, the fallen man’s twin toddler boys followed, carrying his battered helmet that had been found at ground zero.

I was singing for the funeral Mass from above in the choir

loft, and I had to look away. If I didn’t, I’d cry, and crying is not conducive to singing. But I felt desolate, aching for those little boys who would grow up without a father.

It wasn’t the first funeral Mass I’d sung after 9/11, nor certainly the last. One could say I found my vocation as a singer through the days that followed the attack on the twin towers.

By the time of the attacks, I’d lived in New York City for eight years. A native of Michigan, I’d relocated there in 1993 to take what I believed was my dream job of working at DC Comics. I also discovered not long after that that I could sing.

Of course, having made this discovery, I knew I had to cultivate the gift that God had given me. But I was at a loss as to how to use it since most singers my age would

have already begun a career singing for operas and theater companies. Nevertheless, I found a good voice teacher in Manhattan and managed to pay for lessons.

But voice wasn’t my primary focus. I am, and always will be, a writer. In the end, I left the position at DC Comics to work in Internet content and website development, taking positions at several companies in lower Manhattan, the last of which I left two weeks prior to 9/11.

That job was in a building on Trinity Place, only a block away from the South Tower of the World Trade Center. I would have taken the subway to that very station and would have been in the building at 9 that morning had I not been laid off like so many of my peers in the web industry implosion that occurred that year.

But, as it was, that morning I was at a New York state-required appointment at the unemployment office in the South Bronx when the first plane struck the North Tower. I ended up stranded there as all forms of public transportation were suspended. After wandering through the streets of stunned people listening to the news on their boomboxes and others watching the images of the burning buildings on TVs in the open doors of bars and laundromats, I found an independent cab driver willing to drive me home to my apartment in the North Bronx.

With all the freeways being closed to traffic, he had to take the back streets, making it about a 45-minute drive through heavy traffic. I called my mother during that long ride home as well as my sister who lived in New Jersey, and my husband

who was working in Manhattan at 36th street by Macy’s. When I reached my apartment, I sat in front of my TV like many Americans while I cried and prayed my rosary. My husband didn’t get home until late, for he had to wait for the subways to start running again.

While the events of the actual day were traumatic, the days and weeks that followed were even more arduous, causing me to focus on my faith and my secondary gift of voice. A year or two before this, I’d begun serving as a cantor for my parish to gain some singing experience. After the attack, I received a call from our parish organist, asking if I would be free to sing evening Masses. They were adding these Masses to the schedule every night for people to come in and pray for the victims and for those working at ground zero.

Of course, I agreed. What I didn’t realize was how many members of my parish were emergency personnel, though being an Irish parish, it made sense.

While I switched off evenings with another cantor, every other night I would sing Mass for a congregation made up mostly of firefighters and police officers who were returning from ground zero, all covered in dust. Since I sang at the front of the church, I’d often see them weeping during Mass, traumatized by what they’d seen or mourning those they’d lost.

By the time it came to sing at the funeral Mass of the firefighter with the toddler twins, several months had passed, and I’d sung at more Masses than I could count. One night, I was almost unable to

sing because I fought tears for those who were crying in the pews.

I therefore asked my priest, Father Lee, if I could sing these Masses from the choir loft at the rear of the church. An immigrant from County Cork in Ireland, his eyes held a sad twinkle as he told me that while he’d normally say yes, he said not this time. “They need to know you’re there,” he said. “You need to stay up front and be there for them.”

I’m sure he knew that what he was asking me to do was difficult. He had a way of testing me that way. But it was with his words that I realized why I had my voice. My voice was truly meant for them and for God.

Today, because of those Masses after 9/11, I’ve made singing for the Church the focus of my vocal work. While I’ve had the honor of singing in the chorus of the Indianapolis Opera, my greatest joy has been offering my voice at the parishes of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary in Indianapolis, Holy Name of Jesus in Beech Grove, and St. Mary and the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, both in Indianapolis.

I no longer worry that my voice isn’t used for something “grander” as my voice teachers might have liked. I know it’s being used where God and his people need it, and there’s nothing better than that.

*(Ann Margaret Lewis is executive assistant in the archdiocesan Office of Communications and the author of several books. E-mail her at [alewis@archindy.org](mailto:alewis@archindy.org).) †*

# Solidarity shared on 9/11 by Catholics, Muslims in Indy continues

By Sean Gallagher

In the days following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, many American Muslims experienced an angry and sometimes violent backlash from their fellow Americans because the men who hijacked the airliners that day had been Muslim extremists.

The Nur-Allah Islamic Center in Indianapolis had multiple bombing threats made against it in the days after 9/11. So, when the Muslims of the center gathered for prayer on the Friday after the attacks, they knew that they could become the victims of an attack themselves.

But they weren't alone. Joining them that day were some of their Catholic friends who were members of Focolare, an international lay ecclesial movement in the Church that, among other things, promotes greater unity in the broader human family.

"It was a very emotionally moving experience," said Nur-Allah member

David Shaheed, who has also served as a Marion County judge since 1996. "They felt connected to us. They felt that we were friends and neighbors. They put their lives at risk to be with us at such a historically tumultuous and scary time."



David Shaheed

John Mundell, a member of St. Pius X Parish on 9/11, was part of the Focolare group that came to Nur-Allah on Sept. 14, 2001.

"That experience was probably one of the most sacred moments of my life," he said. "When we walked in as a group and they saw us, you could tell by the look on their faces that they realized that what we had established was real. There was nothing fake or superficial about it."

The Focolare members knew that choosing to stand with their friends at Nur-Allah after bombing threats had been made against their center potentially put their lives in danger. But their mutual relationship was important enough to them that they accepted that risk.

"Our Catholic faith called us to be there with them," said Mundell, now a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis. "This was where the rubber

met the road. In your gut, you know what the right thing to do is, but you then have to say, 'Yes, we're doing it.'"

Thankfully, no attacks happened on that day. But some members of Nur-Allah so appreciated the solidarity shown to them by their Catholic friends that they joined them for Mass two days later at St. Pius X Church. "It was reciprocal love," said Mundell. "You reached out in love and then received this kind of wave [of love] back. It was a sacred feeling. Somehow there was the presence of God in this relationship we had established."

That relationship had started in 1997 and followed the example of Chiara Lubich, the Italian foundress of Focolare, who had reached out to W.D. Muhammed, the leader of a branch of Islam in the United States made up primarily of Black Americans.

In the years that followed the start of the relationship in Indianapolis, the members of Focolare and Nur-Allah hosted meetings of Catholics and Muslims that drew people from across the Midwest. One had taken place in Indianapolis less than two months before 9/11.

But the events of that day quickly deepened their relationship in ways that they could not have imagined.

"There are times when God calls us to unity through pain," said Michael Saahir, the resident imam of Nur-Allah.

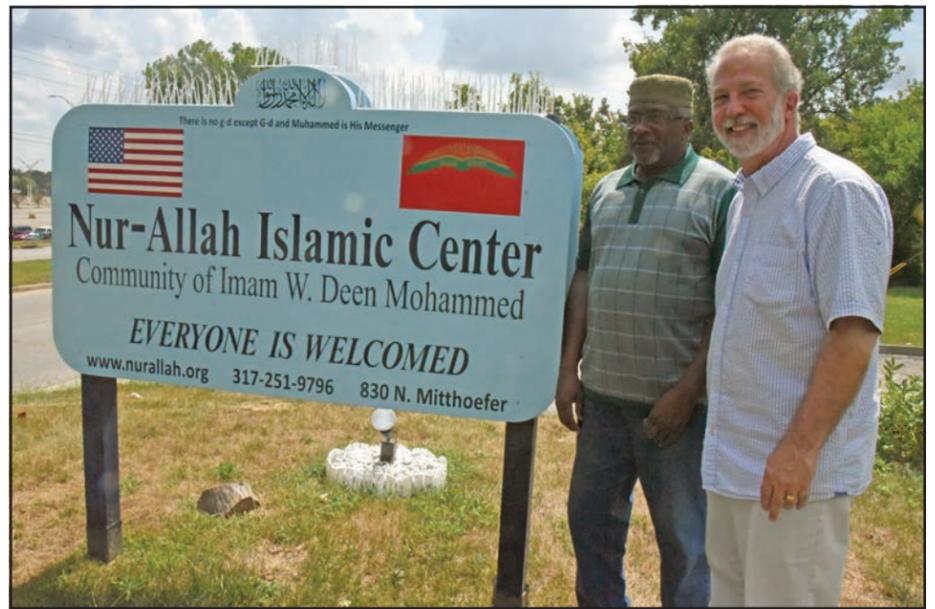
That, for him, is an enduring lesson of 9/11, one that he is concerned is being forgotten as the years pass.

"Too often, when the pain subsides, we forget," Saahir said. "We tend to forget too easily. Or we don't even take time to study the lessons that come from it. And the oneness of the human family is the main one."

In recent years, members of Focolare in Indianapolis have become more aware of the pain experienced by their Black Muslim friends because of their race.

"We're not perfect as Americans, as Catholics in embracing this idea of universal brotherhood and sisterhood," Mundell said. "We have a long way to go. There's a racial aspect that we need to continue to work on and listen to."

Focolare and Nur-Allah members are making efforts so that the lessons of 9/11 and other lessons are remembered. In the months and years that have followed that day, people from both faith communities have been



Michael Saahir, left, and John Mundell stand on Aug. 26 by the sign of the Nur-Allah Islamic Center in Indianapolis. The pair and other Muslims and Catholics in Indianapolis have had a close relationship since 1997 that was tested in the days following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

invited to parishes across and beyond the archdiocese and to universities to speak about their interreligious experience and relationship.

When Mundell started receiving these invitations, he began to recognize a significance to the simple personal bonds that had been created with his Muslim friends in 1997.

"It made us realize the uniqueness of that relationship and that it was no longer meant for just us," he said. "It was meant to be shared with everyone."

"People need to see a model or example," said Saahir. "I'm grateful that our relationship with Focolare is a model, not just for Muslims and Catholics, but for anyone to see that this is doable and has longevity."

Mundell and Saahir hope that the

longevity of the relationship between their two communities will continue into the next generation.

"It's like passing on your faith," Mundell said. "The next generation has to take it on as their own. They have to have their own experience."

"This is something that we'll be doing for the rest of our lives. The relationships have to be continually renewed and rebuilt." †



A group of Catholic and Muslim youths gather in 2006 at Martin University in Indianapolis around W.D. Mohammed, then the leader of a branch of Islam in the United States made up primarily of Black Americans. (Submitted photo)



Dave Cook, a member of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis, stands amid the rubble of ground zero in New York City following the terrorist attacks that destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. Cook was a member at the time of Indiana Task Force 1, an elite urban search and rescue team that was deployed to ground zero. He is still a member of the task force and a battalion chief for the Indianapolis Fire Department. (Submitted photo)

## TASK FORCE

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the 65 task force members who were deployed to New York have developed various illnesses related to their work there.

Glesing is one of them. He suffers from reactive airway disease.

"They call it the World Trade Center cough," he said. He and others with ongoing physical effects from service at ground zero have their related medical care paid for through federal programs. The programs were established by the John Zadroga Act, named in honor of a New York Police Department officer whose death was linked to exposure to toxins at ground zero. The relatives of those who have died have also been compensated for their loss.

Despite the ongoing challenges of serving at ground zero, Glesing doesn't regret working there.

"I'd go again in a heartbeat," he said. "If the bell goes off, you get on the truck and go. That's the nature of whatever's inside of you to be a helpful person to your community. You're just willing to do something a little more dangerous."

### 'The ultimate calling'

Given that these men embraced a profession in which self-sacrifice is a daily possibility, it's no wonder that their Catholic faith and their work were deeply intermingled.

Growing up as the son of a police officer in Indianapolis, Glesing knew from a young age the meaning and importance of giving of oneself in serving others.

He discerned the possibility that God might be calling him to serve as a priest, graduating in 1974 from the Latin School of Indianapolis, the archdiocese's former high school seminary, and in 1978 from the former Saint Meinrad College in St. Meinrad.

At that time, Glesing's discernment led him away from priestly formation to service for four years as a teacher at

Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis. He became a firefighter in 1982.

"I always knew, even when I was contemplating a [priestly] vocation, that a career or a vocation of service to others was one of the best and highest ways that you can live your life," Glesing said. "You're there to help others, whether it's as a firefighter, police officer, priest, nun, doctor—whatever. If you're there because you want to help others, that is the ultimate calling there is."

For Cook, this calling to service includes caring for the firefighters under his command. Seeing such loss among first responders on Sept. 11, 2001, reinforced this duty in him.

"I have to watch out for their well-being when we're doing fires or technical rescues, being cautious as their protector, watching their back and making decisions that will allow them to go back to their families," he said.

Cook said that he looks to "the model of Christ to give back to other human beings and to help them and feel compassion for them."

Glesing's faith led him to see giving comfort to those he served as a part of his mission as a firefighter.

"Because of some of my background from being in seminary, I also saw that I was there to comfort where I could, if the opportunity arose," Glesing said.

At ground zero, that happened in simple moments such as when firefighters would visit search and rescue dogs that Indiana Task Force 1 brought in its deployment.

"The FDNY guys would see the dogs and come over to pet them," Glesing recalled. "A couple of them broke down in tears because the dog was something normal. It comforted people."

When Baughman returned to ground zero in 2018, the visit "reinforced what our calling is all about."

"We didn't do anything [to rescue anyone], but people still need to know that there's good out there and there are people who have faith and understanding of doing the right thing," Baughman said. "Where would we be if people didn't have that basic understanding?" †

# 'Never forget,' says foundation CEO who lost firefighter brother in 9/11

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Frank Siller still goes to the same Catholic church he has gone to since he was a little kid, Blessed Sacrament in the New York City borough of Staten Island. He always sits in his family's same pew for Mass.

This is one illustration of the strong place the Catholic faith has in the lives of Siller, 68, and his siblings as they do the work of the Tunnel to Towers Foundation.

They began the foundation to honor the sacrifice of Stephen, their baby brother, a firefighter with the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) who gave his life, like so many others did, trying to save lives on 9/11—the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

The foundation helps the spouses and children of firefighters and police officers killed in the line of duty, and for many of these families pays off their remaining mortgage. Its Gold Star program provides mortgage-free homes to Gold Star families with young children of military members who have died while serving their country.

It also assists military members who return home from war with catastrophic injuries by providing these warriors and their families new mortgage-free, specially adapted smart homes—100 and counting. And it plans to build a community of these mortgage-free smart homes called "Let Us Do Good Village" in Florida.

"Catholic faith drives all we do," said Siller, the foundation's CEO and chairman.

His late parents, George and Mae, were secular Franciscans who taught their seven children to follow the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the center of his life in serving others. The elder Sillers always quoted one of the saint's well-known sayings: "While we have time, let us do good."

"It's a simple mission," Siller said of the foundation's work. "But it is very important we succeed and take care of the families left behind."

He spoke to Catholic News Service (CNS) ahead of his "Never Forget Walk," a more than 500-mile journey through six states to mark the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks, taking him from the Pentagon in Virginia to Shanksville, Pa., and then to New York City and ground zero in lower Manhattan, the former site of the World Trade Center. Siller expects to complete the walk by Sept. 11.

"It is first time I've done anything like this—525 miles," he said. "I decided to do it because I wanted to make sure we shine a big light on what happened 20 years ago. It's meaningful and personal for the foundation to go to the three locations that had such great loss of life."

The morning of Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked two passenger planes and flew them into the World Trade Center, destroying the twin towers.

This attack was quickly followed by terrorists flying a third hijacked passenger plane into the Pentagon. A fourth passenger plane, initially headed to Washington, crashed into a field near Shanksville after passengers thwarted the hijackers.

Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attacks, including the 246 passengers and 19 hijackers aboard the planes. More than 6,000 others were injured, and many people have suffered substantial long-term health consequences.

It is one of the single deadliest terrorist attacks in human history and is the single deadliest incident for first responders in the history of the United States.

The "Never Forget Walk" is really "becoming more of a spiritual journey," said Siller, who is being joined along the way by families the foundation has helped, as well as first responders, military members, veterans and supporters of the foundation.

On Aug. 1, he and his family held a private wreath-laying ceremony at the Pentagon in Virginia, then joined the other participants to begin the walk at nearby Arlington County Fire Station 5, one of the stations that responded to the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon.

Siller said he and his siblings didn't set out to do all that the foundation is doing now but the effort has grown. The enterprise began as a way to "honor our brother's sacrifice," he said. "There is no greater love than what he gave—his life for strangers. ... We were just moved, inspired by his selflessness."

"We're a very simple blue collar family," he said. "There is no doubt that God has put us in a position to do this work. None of us get paid; we're volunteers."

The "foundation of the foundation is the family," said Msgr. Peter G. Finn, former pastor of Staten Island's Blessed Sacrament Parish.

The Sillers "are devoted to each other.

They are a very dedicated group of people, faithful to religion, family and community," the retired priest told CNS. "Frank exemplifies it. ... What he's doing now is an ongoing thing he's been doing for most of his life."

Before Stephen's tragic death and the foundation that followed, he said, people already knew Frank for his charitable efforts "and his kindness." He



Frank Siller, chairman and CEO of the Tunnel to Towers Foundation, waves his hat outside of a fire station in Arlington, Va., on Aug. 1 as he and other participants start the "Never Forget Walk" in memory of the nearly 3,000 lives lost during the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. The 500-mile-plus walk began near the Pentagon, then was headed to Shanksville, Pa., and was to end in New York City at ground zero, site of the former World Trade Center's twin towers. The walk was to end close to Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of 9/11. (CNS photo/courtesy Tunnel to Towers Foundation)

"has a supporting cast of family that are unbelievable in their goodness and faith and their kindness," added Msgr. Finn, a former director of communications for the New York Archdiocese and a former seminary rector.

Frank Siller's commitment to the foundation is "almost apostolic," the priest said. "He's a tough guy, a good guy and he'd work himself down to the bone to make sure this [effort] continues."

The foundation gets its funding from "the masses," Siller noted, adding with a laugh, "I don't say that because of Catholic Mass." Grassroots donors who commit \$11 a month support the foundation, not corporate donors.

"Everybody should do something for our military that die for us, the cops and firemen," he said. Those who give \$11 a month see what the foundation does and can say "my \$11 a month did that," he added.

The "Tunnel" in the foundation's name is the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. Stephen Siller, 34, ran through the two-mile tunnel to the site of the World Trade Center. He was off duty that day but heard the emergency calls and suited up and carried his 60 pounds of FDNY gear on his back through the tunnel. He left behind his wife, Sarah, and their five children.

His brother running through the tunnel that day also serves as a metaphor for how the Siller family eventually worked through the grief his death brought—they moved through the "tunnel of despair to find hope" and turned tragedy into service, and they work to help others through the same tunnel.

"Everything we do is focused on doing good," Siller said, and helping those who "lose loved ones with no notice [and] have to continue living with this



Stephen Siller is pictured in his FDNY fireman's uniform standing by a fire engine on a New York City street on May 3, 2001. Siller died working to save others after the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City. His brother, Frank, and his other siblings founded the Tunnel to Towers Foundation in his memory. (CNS photo/courtesy Tunnel to Towers Foundation)

unbelievable sadness and try to bring joy into their life.

"You can survive it," Siller said. "Mae and George wouldn't let us complain about a thing," and would always tell their children to "do something for someone else."

He said he told his own children the same thing when they were growing up. He has three children and six grandchildren.

Siller misses Stephen every day. They were the closest in age of all their siblings, and he had a role in helping raise his little brother.

By the time, Stephen was 10, their mom and dad had died. The oldest Siller, Russ, and Russ's wife, Jacky, took in Stephen and raised him with the help of Frank and the others. Russ died on Nov. 8, 2019, at age 77.

The first thing Siller does every morning is look at his photos of Stephen, Russ, and his mom and dad, and tells them, "Good morning."

Family, faith, God and "most certainly our country" are top of mind for him every day, he said.

And his mission has been the same since 9/11: Never forget.

(More information on the Tunnel to Towers Foundation website can be found at <https://t2t.org>.) †



The U.S. Marine Corps Band plays outside of a fire station in Arlington, Va., on Aug. 1 as participants in the "Never Forget Walk" honor the victims of the 9/11 attack in New York, in Shanksville, Pa., and at the Pentagon in Virginia. The walkers will journey over 500 miles through five states and end up at "ground zero" in New York City close to the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the worst terrorist attacks on the U.S. in its history. (CNS photo/courtesy Tunnel to Towers Foundation)



**'It's a simple mission. But it is very important we succeed and take care of the families left behind.'**

—Frank Siller, Tunnel to Towers Foundation's CEO and chairman