

September 11, 2001



*We Were There...*

**Catholic Priests and How They Responded**  
*In Their Own Words*

# “We Were There...”

## Table of Contents

Rev. Kevin M. Smith .....	one
<i>Fr. Smith is a Chaplain with the Nassau County Fire Department on Long Island and responded to the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001. He was the priest who identified and blessed the body of FDNY Chaplain Father Mychal F. Judge, OFM.</i>	
Rev. James Martin, SJ .....	three
<i>Fr. Martin is the Associate Editor of America Magazine. He responded to the scene of the World Trade Center from his office at America, which is located in downtown Manhattan.</i>	
Rev. Msgr. Marc A. Filacchione .....	five
<i>Msgr. Filacchione is a Chaplain with the New York Fire Department. He arrived on the scene at the World Trade Center shortly before the Towers collapsed, and then ministered to the injured that were brought to St. Vincent's Hospital.</i>	
Rev. Conrad Ostenhout, CFR .....	six
<i>Fr. Ostenhout and his fellow brothers responded to their local fire stations in the Bronx and were also present at Ground Zero for counsel and prayer services.</i>	
Rev. Emile Frische, MHM .....	eight
<i>Fr. Frische responded to the Pierre Hotel, where family members of Cantor Fitzgerald gathered on September 11, 2001, from his downtown offices at the Catholic Center for the Archdiocese of New York.</i>	
Rev. David J. Baratelli .....	ten
<i>Fr. Baratelli is the Chaplain for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and was at Newark Airport on the morning of September 11, 2001. He later went to Manhattan to respond to the needs of the Port Authority police officers and personnel at Ground Zero.</i>	
Rev. John E. Kozar .....	eleven
<i>Fr. Kozar was awaiting the start of a board meeting at his office, the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States, on the morning of September 11, 2001. He made sure his employees were safe before returning to his residence in south Manhattan. On his way home, he was confronted by several emergency personnel who asked for the sacrament of Penance.</i>	
Rev. Jeff Ethen.....	thirteen
<i>Fr. Ethen was on vacation in New York City, from Minnesota, on the morning of September 11, 2001. He immediately went to St. Vincent's Hospital to attend to the injured. Over the next few days, he was assigned to a group of chaplains who worked with the city's missing person's bureau.</i>	
Rev. James P. Nieckarz, MM .....	fifteen
<i>Fr. Nieckarz was at the rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration in lower Manhattan on the morning of September 11, 2001. He and a fellow priest attempted to find the triage center that was set up at the World Trade Center. After escaping the collapse, he attended to the needs of those taken to St. Vincent's Hospital.</i>	

# “We Were There...”

## Table of Contents

### C O N T I N U E D

Rev. John C. Petrich .....	sixteen
<i>Fr. Petrich is a Chaplain with the Duluth Police Department who responded to the call for chaplains in New York in the weeks after September 11, 2001. He served as a grief counselor to those searching Ground Zero for survivors.</i>	
Rev. William R. Wentink.....	seventeen
<i>Fr. Wentink is a Chaplain with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. On September 12, 2001, the FBI asked him to come to Ground Zero. He was then assigned to the morgue which received the bodies of police officers and firefighters.</i>	
Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Coyle .....	eighteen
<i>Msgr. Coyle served as a Chaplain for the Armed Services at the Family Assistance Center established nearby the Pentagon in the days following September 11, 2001. There he counseled and celebrated Mass with the families.</i>	
Rev. LaVerne L. Schueller .....	nineteen
<i>Fr. Schueller was attending a meeting of chaplains from the various branches of the Armed Services in the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, 2001. He was on the scene the entire day, attending to the needs of the wounded. Fr. Schueller and the group of chaplains also helped search the building for survivors.</i>	
Rev. Joseph McCaffrey .....	twenty one
<i>Fr. McCaffrey arrived on the scene at Shanksville, PA on September 12, 2001 as a chaplain with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He served as the liaison between the FBI, families, and United Airlines in regards to visitation of the crash site, which was declared a crime scene.</i>	
Rev. Sean K. Code .....	twenty two
<i>Fr. Code received a call from his local hospital on the morning of September 11, 2001, alerting him that a passenger jet had crashed nearby in Shanksville, PA. In the coming days, Fr. Code attended to the members of the local community, and the family members of those visiting the crash site, along with Fr. McCaffrey.</i>	
Rev. Msgr. Peter C. Moran.....	twenty four
<i>Msgr. Moran is the pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes in Northridge, CA. One of his parish's families had a son who died on one of the planes that crashed on September 11, 2001.</i>	
Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski.....	twenty five
<i>Fr. Iwanowski was finishing his breakfast in his rectory, three blocks from the Hudson River in Jersey City, NJ, on the morning of September 11, 2001. He immediately went to the parish grammar school to attend to the children. Throughout the day, he kept the church open to those who were being deposited on the Jersey City side of the river by ferries coming out of lower Manhattan.</i>	

## Rev. Kevin M. Smith

---

*Currently the Pastor at the Church of St. Francis de Sales in Patchogue, NY and a Chaplain with the Nassau County Fire Department. He was ordained in 1988 in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.*

On September 11, 2001, I was in my rectory at St. Rose of Lima in Massapequa where I was the Associate Pastor when one of my secretaries told me to turn on the television. She told me a plane had just crashed into the Trade Center. I am a Fire Chaplain and I have been to plane crash scenes before. As I turned on the TV, I saw the north tower top engulfed in fire. I then saw a second plane headed for the second tower live on TV. My first thought was that this couldn't be real, but it was. My pager that I wear as a Fire Chaplain for Nassau County, New York went off with a message that there was a crash at the Trade Center and there were massive casualties. My county borders New York City and I knew I had to get there.

My brother, Patrick, is a firefighter in New York City and he lives in Massapequa. He is a member of 41 Truck in the Bronx. I called his house to see if he was working and he was home. He said the FDNY recalled all members to work. I picked up Pat with my personal vehicle because it has emergency lights and it would be easier to get through traffic. I was going to drop Pat off in the Bronx and then I was going to the Trade Center. As we were heading to the Bronx, the first tower collapsed. As I reached the Bronx and dropped Pat off the second tower fell.

I arrived on the scene at the Trade Center and parked by City Hall at about 11:00 AM. The sky was dark and debris was still falling. I put on my helmet and bunker gear and headed over to what looked like a fire command center behind St. Paul's Church. A fireman saw that I was a priest and told me that Fr. Mychal Judge, a FDNY Chaplain was killed in the collapse and asked me if I could bless the body. I asked where he was and the fireman pointed west down Vesey Street toward the Trade Center. He said I could not go down there yet because Emergency Service trucks from the NYPD were blowing up from the fire and debris falling from the Trade Center. After about a half hour the explosions were slowing down and the firefighters and police were starting to go back to the collapse area. As I walked down Vesey Street, I started to see the magnitude of destruction. Many cars and emergency vehicles were on fire. I came upon an ambulance at the corner of Vesey and Church Street. It was covered in white ash and debris from the towers; but it was not on fire. As I walked next to the ambulance I saw the body of a man, partially covered with ash and I knelt down next to him. He was obviously dead and I blessed the body with holy water I had with me and I said the prayer for the dead. When I got up I placed an orange traffic cone I found nearby next to the body so it would not be lost under the debris when someone came with a litter to remove it from the scene. I continued looking for anyone that might be hurt and I found myself just staring up at the empty hole that used to be the magnificent World Trade Center Towers. It looked like a scene out of a movie. A little while later out of the smoke came that same fireman. He asked me if I found Fr. Mychal's body. I asked him where he placed it and he pointed to the ambulance. I remember seeing the body I blessed being taken up the street and so I went up the street to this office building where the police had set up a temporary command post. The building had a "99" on it and when I went inside the body was on a backboard with a blue sheet over it. I asked the officer who was standing next to the body to help me find some identification. As we rolled the body over I found Mychal's fire department badge and identification in his pants pocket. It hit me like a ton of bricks. I had attended numerous firefighters' funerals over the years and Mychal was at them. Most recently, I remembered talking to Mychal at the funerals of Brian Fahey and John Downing, who were killed in the Father's Day fire just three months before. I became very emotional and was comforted by the policeman who was standing by. I knew I could not just leave Mychal's body in the hallway of an office building. I went outside the building and found 4 or 5 firefighters standing on the corner across from St. Peter's Church. I brought them back to the building and asked them to help me bring the body of Fr. Mychal over to St. Peter's Church. I took off the blood soaked blue sheet and replaced it with a white sheet I found in one of the offices.

As we brought the body into the Church, medical personnel were setting up a triage area in the back of the Church to treat the wounded. We brought the body up to the altar and laid it in the sanctuary in front of the altar. I went into the sacristy and found a stole. I placed the stole and Mychal's badge on the cov-

ered litter on his chest. I sat in the first pew and prayed. I prayed that the Lord would welcome home this good and faithful priest and he would protect all those who were working in this massive rescue and recovery effort.

As word spread of Fr. Mychal's death and whereabouts, many firefighters and fire officers came into the Church to take off their helmets, salute, and offer a private prayer. It was a very moving sight and many were moved to tears.

A short time later we were told that we were in the collapse zone of 7 World Trade Center and we had to evacuate the Church. The mobile triage center was moved up the block toward City Hall. I went up the block with them and saw a priest who was an associate at St. Peter's and he and I went back to St. Peter's rectory and called the Cardinal's office to tell him of Fr. Mychal's death. They in turn called Mychal's order, the Franciscan Friars on 31st Street. Two of the Friars came right down to the Church and asked if they could take the body uptown to their residence so he would not be lost if another building collapsed. A FDNY medical officer was close by and she pronounced Mychal deceased and gave him the number one on the death certificate. Firefighters came in and placed the body in an ambulance along with the Friars and escorted the ambulance back to 31st Street.

In the hours that followed, Number 4 and 5 World Trade Center burned out of control. I made my way down to West Street where the rescue and recovery effort was concentrated. I stayed close to the main command center to see if I was needed. From time to time they would find another uniformed person in the collapse and ask me to come to bless the body and say a prayer before the body was removed to the temporary morgue. All during this time I was talking to the rescuers, some of them survivors of both collapses. They were wondering why they were spared and the person right behind them was lost. Many of the firefighters and police officers who work in New York City live in the County of Nassau and are members of our volunteer fire service. It was in this first day that I came to the realization that many of the men I came to know through our close association were lost. Many of the men who taught at our Fire Service Academy in Nassau were part of the specialized units who responded first to the Trade Center. So many of them were lost in the Towers. I heard a lot of confessions that day and many of them including the ironworkers were asking for a blessing when they saw me. Throughout the night I worked on the pile shoulder to shoulder with police, fire, and medical rescue. We were hoping to find at least someone still alive in the pile; maybe someone in an underground garage or the shopping mall. It would become apparent that the ones that got out got out and the ones that didn't got caught between hundreds of floors of collapsing steel, cement, and sheetrock. We found body parts mostly, and each, no matter how small, were treated with dignity and transported to the temporary morgue. Many clergy, who did not have protective clothing and had arrived to help, worked in the rest areas with the rescuers and also manned the temporary morgue. The one thing I heard so many times from the rescuers that night was, "Hey Father, thanks for being down here with us, it really means a lot." It felt great to be a priest. Over the day and night I would call my parents to let them know I was safe and when I left the Trade Center at about 4:00 AM I drove to my parents house to let them see me and to reassure them I was alright. I had so much dust and ash on me I think I scared them. I took a shower and returned to my rectory.

In the weeks and months that followed, I attended many of the funerals and memorial services for my firefighters and friends who were lost that day.



## Rev. James Martin, SJ

*Associate editor of America magazine and author of "Searching for God at Ground Zero". He was ordained a priest in 1999 in the Society of Jesus.*

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was sitting at my desk in the offices of America magazine, in New York City, when I received a phone call from my mom. "Turn on the TV," she said, "The World Trade Center was hit by a plane!" My first reaction, like many people, was one of curiosity: surely it was a small plane, and surely it must have been an accident. I prayed that no one had been hurt.

When I received another frantic phone call from a friend, I flipped on the television and saw the sickening site that viewers around the world were watching. Immediately I rushed outside and peered down Sixth Avenue. Terrified men and women were already running north towards Central Park, many frantically working their cell phones, some weeping. Many, as they ran, kept looking over their shoulders, behind them. For there, at the end of the vista, was an appalling column of blue-black smoke that obliterated the horizon.

That night, I put on my collar and went to a nearby hospital. Already overrun with clergy, the harried staff sent me to a local triage station, where it was thought that I could be of greater use. But at the triage station that night the assembled volunteers—doctors, nurses, EMS technicians, psychologists and clergy members—waited for survivors who would never come.

The next day, unsure of where to go, I decided to volunteer at St. Vincent's Hospital, which had arranged an ad hoc family-counseling center. There I helped family members and friends comb through pages, compiled by local hospitals, which listed any survivors. Few found good news.

On Sept. 13, I returned to the triage center, seeking to help. Directed upstairs, I met the head of the clergy volunteer effort. "Another priest?," she said, with a sigh, telling that she already had far too many priests, ministers, rabbis, sisters and brothers. So I walked down the stairs and stood outside, surrounded by masses of fire trucks, police cruisers and ambulances, wondering how I could be of use.

When a policeman sidled up to me, I asked him, with almost no reflection, "Do they need anyone down there?" He knew instantly what I was talking about, and waved his hand. In a few seconds a police cruiser materialized, a door opened and I climbed in. In ten minutes I was at Ground Zero.

I would work there, later alongside several other young Jesuits, for the next several weeks. And in retrospect I can easily say that it was the most profound experience of the presence of grace that I've ever had.

I suppose it's simplest to say that our ministry during those weeks was one of listening: listening to a firefighter talk quietly about one of his "buddies" who had been killed, listening to a police officer say that had he been a few feet closer to the buildings he would not be talking to me; listening to an EMS worker tell me that she prayed that the victims hadn't suffered much; listening to an iron worker say that every time he pulls out a body from "the pile" he saw the faces of his wife and children.

It was also what Catholics call a "sacramental" ministry. On the first Sunday after the attack, four of us decided to celebrate Mass for the assembled workers. (Most of the firefighters and many of the police officers, we knew, were Catholics.) On that cloudless morning we set up a small altar only a few feet away from the smoking remains of the World Trade Center, and covered it with a simple cloth. In a few minutes a small group of dog-tired and dust covered rescue workers had gathered. The Gospel reading for that day was almost frighteningly relevant: in a passage from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks of the shepherd who

loses his sheep and sets out to find him. So around the altar we spoke of the God who seeks and who finds—actions mirrored in the work of the rescuers at Ground Zero.

After the Mass, one of the Jesuits pointed to a sign that someone had leaned against our altar. At the time, workers were in the habit of placing large plywood boards around the site, on which were scrawled, in bright orange paint, notices for the workers: "Hot Food," said one. "Eyewash Station," said one. "Morgue," said another.

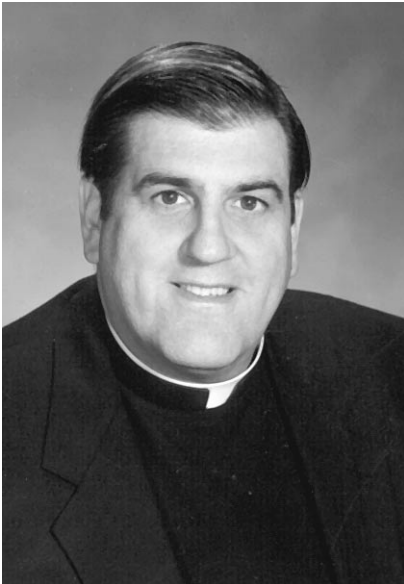
On the sign next to our altar someone had written: "Body of Christ."

Perhaps the anonymous signmaker had concluded, after hearing us distributing Communion and saying, "The Body of Christ," over and over that this is what we were giving out. And he or she was right. But for me the sign pointed to something else. To me it said, Here is the Body of Christ, broken and bloodied and awaiting resurrection. Here is the Body of Christ, the church, gathered together to worship and to work. Here is the Body of Christ, with you.

I saw many other "signs" of God's presence in my work at Ground Zero: the police officer too concerned about my own welfare to consider dwelling on his own, the Ohio grandmother offering candy bars at a Salvation Army post because "that's just what we do," the Florida firefighter who had driven for two nights straight to be at the site, the Army officer who said he was sure that the presence of so much charity was the work of God.

Each of these people was a sign of God's presence, a sign of new life in a place of great death. In this way Ground Zero always reminded me of Calvary, the site of Jesus' crucifixion: a place of death and a place that held the promise of new life. I remember telling a friend at the time: If people doubt the presence of evil in the world, let them come to Ground Zero. But if people doubt the presence of grace in the world, too, let them come to Ground Zero.





## **Rev. Msgr. Marc A. Filacchione**

*Currently the Pastor of St. Michael's Church in Manhattan and a New York Fire Department Chaplain. He was ordained in 1980 in the Archdiocese of New York.*

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I received a telephone call from a worried parishioner who informed me that her son, Philip, had just called from his office at the World Trade Center to tell her that moments before a plane hit the tower and that he was safe. I immediately turned on the television to see if the morning news programs had any information on this emergency. The first image broadcast on the television was one of the towers with smoke billowing from the top floors. My pager from the New York City Fire Department sounded and I began to make my way to the Trade Center.

Due to the heavy emergency vehicle traffic now on the streets of the city, along with the usual rush hour traffic, the streets of midtown Manhattan were becoming very congested. I decided, instead of driving to the

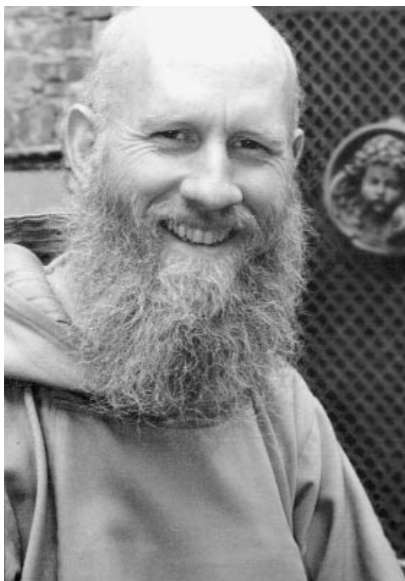
scene, I would take the subway and exit a few train stations before the Trade Center and then secure a ride with one of the emergency vehicles heading south. A police car brought me as close to the World Trade Center as possible. There, several blocks from the Trade Center, I met Father Kevin Madigan, pastor of St. Peter's Church, who joined me as I continued to the Fire Department Command Post to receive any instructions. As we approached the towers, we noticed that a mushroom of gray smoke was dropping to the ground and so we took cover in a subway station which almost immediately became filled with white ash and debris that made it difficult to breathe. This, I believe, was when the second plane struck. Several transit police were also in the subway, and with their assistance, we were able to walk the platform and exit the subway from another location. An ambulance assisted us and directed us to St. Vincent's Medical Center where we would be examined. I lost track of Father Madigan and continued to walk to the hospital with the police officers. It was while walking to the hospital that we witnessed the collapse of the towers.



St. Vincent's Medical Center of Manhattan had set up on the street a row of stretchers posted with countless emergency personnel and staff to receive the injured, but it seemed that there were very few to treat compared to the size of the emergency. When I walked into the emergency room at St. Vincent's, the first person I noticed was Cardinal Egan, who was wearing green hospital scrubs. His Eminence immediately came over to me to talk. After our conversation, His Eminence continued to make his way from cubicle to cubicle in the emergency room and the makeshift emergency rooms, praying with, visiting and consoling patients and staff members. After being treated and discharged, I cleaned myself up and returned to the emergency room to be with those firefighters and civilians who had been admitted. I anointed a number of them because of their injuries, talked and counseled others; and at the request of some, attempted to call their families in order to let them know their husband, son, or father was alive. The presence of the priest was for many a blessing in itself. A hard task was just waiting at that time for the injured to be brought in for treatment. As the evening hours approached it became extremely uncomfortable to be with the firemen in the emergency rooms, although no one actually knew the number of lives lost, all were fully aware that it had to be a great number. The prayer's just continued that friends and fellow firefighters were safe. That evening I remained in the hospital until midnight and returned the next day.

On September 12, 2001, after visiting the firefighters who were not released, I went with other priests to several floors of the hospital. We were asked to visit patients who were there for other medical reasons and who witnessed from their hospital room windows and televisions the collapses of the World Trade Towers the day before. They were especially in need of pastoral care since many of them could not receive visitors or make phone calls on September 11th.





## Rev. Conrad Ostenhout, CFR

*Currently the Novice Master with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in Yonkers, NY. He was ordained a priest in 1983.*

I don't recall when we were first alerted to the attacks on the Twin Towers. By 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Franciscan Lay Associate Tom Marsich rode up to our house on bicycle. Asking me for Blessing and a scapular, Tom left quickly to join the men of our Harlem Fire Station #80 (nearby our St. Joseph Friary) at the Ground Zero rescue operation.

The next several hours would be characterized by waiting. Without a television we relied heavily upon radio reports. Discussions of our presence and involvement as volunteers would be considered until evening.

We arrived at Chelsea Piers Volunteer & Triage Center around 8 p.m. Tuesday evening. As Novice Master, I gave permission to any brother who would like to offer service as a volunteer. In the South Bronx adjacent to St. Crispin and Our Lady of Angels Friaries, Engine Station #71 was designated a command station for calling up relief teams of firemen. Fr. Bob Lombardo addressed a gathering of several hundred firemen leading prayers and giving general absolution. St. Joseph Friary in Harlem was able to offer services to firemen visiting from neighboring cities. Friars brought bedding and mattresses to Engine Station #80. There was a lot of grieving as the brothers of two firemen were already reported missing. The body of one was found six months later, the other never recovered. I was able to join the men of #80 for dinner one evening. Other brothers stopped to express their support to men at the station house.

We returned to Chelsea Piers to present ourselves as volunteers. I sent Brother Damiano, a registered nurse, along with Brother Isaac, to search out some possibility of offering his professional service at St. Vincent Hospital. The other brothers were unable to offer skills in nursing but gave assistance to families searching and grieving over lost family members. Counseling and consoling was greatly needed as families found no evidence of their loved ones.

Joined by Br. Simon and Br. Shawn-Conrad, Br. Isaac and Br. Damiano were escorted into Ground Zero by officers. Br. Damiano describes the site as acrid in odor, and appearing like a volcanic waste site. Heavy ash was marked with messages in stark contrast. On one window dual messages state, "Now is the time for war!" and "Now is the time for Peace!"

Detectives and police are momentarily relieved of distress by the appearance of young religious. They ask the brothers permission to take their photograph. The moment of welcome distraction passes quickly. Each officer resumes the serious tone demanded in the urgent search for life below the collapsed steel.

At Chelsea Piers little service was needed. Men and women encouraged and united in discussion as they waited. At approximately 9 p.m., emergency medical units from many states were represented in a public display as they drove up the West Side Highway. The piercing sound was an encouragement of solidarity bringing consolation to all who heard them driving up over the course of an hour.

Traveling from Ground Zero, brothers experienced a moment of fright. Searching for a train to ride uptown, brothers walked up Fifth Avenue toward 42nd Street. Suddenly a security officer came out of the Empire State Building, calling out in a loud voice, "Get out of the street". The force of his comments as he declared a bomb scare, sent hundreds of people running frantically down the street.

Traveling the West Side Highway was simultaneously very edifying and very painful. The presence of hundreds of people waving and showing signs of solidarity was punctuated by photographs and names held

aloft of loved ones missing in action. This, for firemen and volunteers aware of the dimming hope of any life to be uncovered was painful to witness.

Encouraged to make a prayerful presence at Ground Zero, on Thursday, Friars stood across the street from the Ground Zero entry gate. At this crossroads friars could extend prayer and blessing for EMT's, firemen, police, military and National Guardsmen. Occasional passers by would stop and ask for prayers for themselves or loved ones. Many personnel were grieving the loss of co-workers and family. One fireman requesting prayers for his Sergeant; lost in the line of duty, expresses thanks for the brothers presence saying, "Ground Zero is like standing on the edge of hell while seeing the brothers (friars) as workers exit and leave for breaks, restores their hope of God's presence in the darkness and decreasing recovery of lives lost at 9/11."

Friday, among growing crowds of volunteers we were unable to gain admittance to the site of Ground Zero. Tightening military security left us in a crowd praying and encouraging many people. CNN requested our live interview for their Sunday Morning program. Br. Damiano, Br. Isaiah and I (Fr. Conrad) prepared ourselves to speak. Br. Isaiah would prepare his thoughts of Gods Mercy. This, to support the many hearts and minds now open to God and to encourage those asking "Where is God?" in such suffering. I would focus on the value of human life making note of the protection of life from conception to natural death and the necessity of consoling (as our brothers were) those who lost loved ones. Br. Damiano presented comment of the light and hope of charity as all of us experienced that differences of creed or any differences disappeared as volunteers worked together. The ugliness of Ground Zero could not overcome the light of charity.

Now, at a distance, because of security concerns, Fr. Marie Antoine, CFR and Br. Damiano pray the Rosary quietly as they can see the site of Ground Zero down a small side street in Manhattan. Other brothers added themselves to works still in progress. Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR volunteered time in counseling. Fr. Angeles, CFR was stationed at the temporary morgue, where every remain or body part was respectfully brought for blessing from clergy of many denominations.



## **Rev. Emile Frische, MHM**

*Currently the Coordinator for Special Ministries with the Archdiocese of New York. He was ordained in 1970.*

September 11, 2001, I arrived at the Catholic Center, New York, around 8:50am to begin another day. I am on the 19th floor and have a wonderful view looking south of the Manhattan skyline. That's when I saw the smoke coming from one of the Towers. I'd heard no news at this stage. The smoke looked black and heavy. Then we got to hear of what

was unfolding before my eyes - the attack on New York, the attack on freedom.

Confused and horrified would be the strongest feelings I had at that stage. I went back to the window to see the volume of smoke increase and hang over Lower Manhattan like a huge black cape covering a prized jewel.

Around 11:30am I received a copy of a fax to the Cardinal's Office, asking me to go to the Pierre Hotel on 5th Avenue, where the families of Cantor Fitzgerald were gathering. This company lost nearly 700 of their employees. I walked in to that hotel and the scene I saw will remain with me for the rest of my life; over 1000 people there, mainly women and children. Yes, wives with no husbands that were coming home; children with no fathers coming home. In addition, a lot of obviously pregnant women whose children would not know their fathers. My heart ached for them. Right in the middle of taking all this in, I was approached by one of the Cantor Fitzgerald people, and asked if I would lead a period of prayer. We prayed the 23rd Psalm, we prayed for the repose of the souls of all who had died that day, we prayed for all who were left behind, we prayed for all who were involved in the rescue effort. There was so much to pray for. We prayed for Peace. As we prayed I looked at all in that room and knew that God was there with us - He had to be, because people gathered there in His name.

We gathered at 3 pm every afternoon after that first day for two weeks for prayer. We had ministers from the other churches of New York, Rabbis and Imams, gathering the people for a time of prayer. The hotel workers paused from their ministry of supplying water and snacks, and joined in the prayer services. Through their ministry, they showed that God cared and was present. I stayed with these people every day for two weeks. On the last day of our being together, we lit candles and all present held a lighted candle - a sign of hope, a sign of life, and a sign of resurrection. A Rabbi chanted the 23rd Psalm in Hebrew, and we prayed a prayer of blessing over all present.

From the end of September 2001 through May 2002, I was on duty at Tmort - the temporary morgue set up at the WTC site. To be able to do this ministry, I had to register with Red Cross and go through a training program. The next eight months shaped the rest of my life.

In all of that chaos and misery, there were inspirational moments. In the Pierre Hotel, after one of the prayer services, I was sitting with a group of women. Ministry of presence would be the best way to describe this. Words were not needed. Making sure they had water, tea, coffee, and tissues - all a very necessary part of my ministry to them. One of these women asked where God was at that time and why did He allow all this to happen. Those two questions were always there. "Where was God right now?" she asked. I looked around at the hotel workers and pointed to them. Then she came out with a statement that just blew me away: "What I need right now is a GOD WITH SKIN ON." Isn't this what I am called to be every day of my life - Jesus alive in the world today - "God with skin on" for others?

One night when I was on duty at the morgue, we were going through a quiet spell, so I walked out to one of the "safe" areas. I was watching the firefighters combing through piles of debris, searching for human remains. They, together with the NYPD and the Port Authority Police, gave of themselves completely in this task. The firefighter group took a break. A group of them were together, resting, having a drink of water

or coffee which the Salvation Army volunteers were bringing round. I noticed one firefighter sitting all alone on an upturned bucket. I picked my way over there asking how he was doing and wanting to talk with him. He didn't want to talk to me. So, I found a bucket and turned it upside down and sat with him. Not a word was said between us. After a good, long time he got up, turned to me and said "Thank you, Father", and left.

One of my most difficult moments came on our last day in the hotel. One of the Cantor Fitzgerald officials had told me that he would never be able to look at all the photos of those who had worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, and had died on that day. I suggested that he should do it at some stage, just to say "thank you" to them. That last afternoon in the hotel I saw Kent going around the room, stopping at each display board, looking at the photos, and crying his heart out.

Another difficult moment was when I was called down in to the "pit" on another occasion when they had found the remains of a couple of firefighters. I had to wait for the rescue workers to bring them out and place them on a rescue board. I looked around the group standing there and made eye contact with one of the firefighters. He was the one I had sat beside on the bucket a few months earlier. He looked no better that morning than he did that night we sat together. We nodded acknowledgement across the rubble, and eventually when I got back home sometime that morning, I crawled into bed for a few hours with a deep ache in my heart and tears flowing down my cheeks.

Many times I administered the Sacrament of Reconciliation on site. Rescue workers would come looking for me, and they also just stopped me along the way, wherever, and ask to "go to confession". We celebrated Reconciliation in the morgue, on the platform overlooking the site, down in the "pit" with all the smells and rubble. I use the word "celebrate" on purpose, because it really was a celebration of new life. I celebrated Mass twice at the space beneath the "Ground Zero Cross". Christmas eve I concelebrated Mass at Cross when it was still on the west side of the site. The cold wind and the crowd of uniformed people and others made this a special Christmas for me. New life will rise from the ashes. You have to believe. All of this gave a whole new meaning of "being" sacrament, and "receiving" sacrament.



## Rev. David J. Baratelli

*Currently the Chaplain of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey at Newark International Airport in NJ. He was ordained in 1982 in the Archdiocese of Newark.*

Returning from my morning run on September 11, 2001, I listened with disbelief to the radio reports of the terrible events unfolding at our Port Authority World Trade Center in New York City. Immediately, I set out for Newark Airport where I tended to my community overwhelmed by concern and grief. A number of our people had friends and co-workers on the planes that had crashed into the Trade Center and the United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark that went down in Pennsylvania. Passengers were stranded with grounded

flights and a closed airport. My initial response was directed at encouraging calm as I consoled and comforted both employees and passengers. Throughout the following days I celebrated Mass, conducted numerous memorial services and offered counseling and assistance to our airport community.

Early that afternoon, I left the airport for the Trade Center with Police Officer John McDevitt of the Port Authority Police Department, Newark Airport Command. Stopping first at our Central Police Desk and then our Headquarters in Jersey City, I was able to offer some support to our emergency management staff. In later days these would become usual stops where I would celebrate Mass, hear Confessions, and offer comfort and counsel.

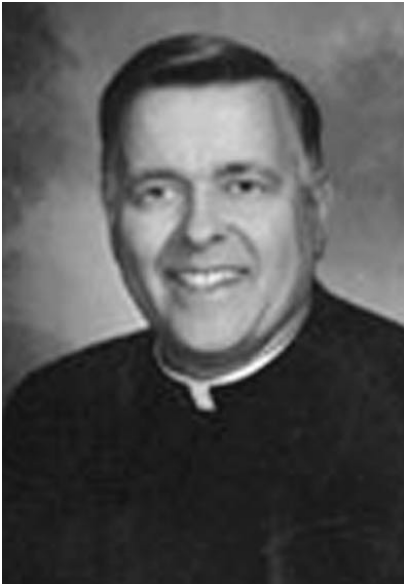
Finally we arrived at the Manhattan Community College gymnasium, the staging area for our Port Authority rescue/recovery operation. Hundreds of police and Port Authority personnel filled the area. Immediately, I joined Msgr. Robert O'Connell, another Port Authority Police Chaplain, in hearing Confessions and offering spiritual counsel.

Throughout the following days, weeks, and months I regularly visited our other Port Authority facilities where; in addition to the airport, I offered Mass and provided sacramental and spiritual services. Many nights were spent at the site saying the prayers for the dead as the remains of our Port Authority officers were found and brought home. Each trip to the morgue was filled with terrible sadness and yet it was the unmistakable presence of Christ in prayer that brought consolation to those moments.

There was also the sad task of going to homes and making notifications when our officers' remains were found. We lost 37 of our Port Authority Police members and there were the many memorial liturgies and funerals. The saddest moments were visiting with the families of the dead and missing; so often young families with young children.

When I think of profound moments in ministry throughout this time I can think of none as profound as just being with God's people in their need. One of the first days following the 11th, just having celebrated the Eucharist at the gym; one of our lieutenants approached me and asked, "Dave is there something you can do for the guys that had to go down to the site before Mass?" And so, the two of us walked down to the site with the ciborium containing the Eucharist. As I stood in the midst of the rubble, one by one, workers came over, uncovered their heads and received the Eucharist. Christ was truly present and He brought consolation and hope to this place of terrible sorrow and death. How privileged, to be one with Him in His priestly service.

Another special moment came as I celebrated the Solemn Easter Vigil at the site. The New Fire blazed, the Paschal Candle burned brightly and the words of the Easter Proclamation took on special meaning. Yes, Christ had conquered! Glory filled this place! Darkness vanished! The Risen Savior shined upon us and by His Holy Resurrection transformed this place of horror and death into a place where His hope and love could be found.



## Rev. John E. Kozar

---

*Currently the National Director for the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States. He was ordained in 1971 in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

I was in my office waiting for the arrival of the national board members to begin our morning meeting at 10:00. I was scheduled to have a Mass with my staff at 9:00. A few minutes before that time, the first reports; very sketchy at best, indicated that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center buildings. The report seemed to indicate that it was more a navigational error of a small plane hitting this building than what would surface a few minutes later.

Then all hell broke loose—we were; literally, under siege. My first thought was getting my staff of 35 home safely. As a backup I arranged with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers to use their residence on 39th Street as a safe house for the national office family, if there turned out to be no way for them to return home. While those who could make their way home on foot—trains were stopped, bridges and tunnels closed—more than half accompanied me to the Maryknoll House after our building had to be evacuated. (We are located only 150 feet from the Empire State Building, and at the time that was thought to be another likely target.)

By mid-afternoon, public transportation resumed and those with me at Maryknoll House began their journey home. I also headed to my own residence, very near Ground Zero, walking, as transportation into that area was still non-existent.

It was on this walk home that the reality of what happened began to confront me. It was what I would imagine the aftermath of a nuclear strike would be like. There was no traffic and no honking of horns in Manhattan, only military and police vehicles. Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue, normally very crowded with traffic and people were almost abandoned. I walked down Park Avenue in the middle of this huge street.

At one of the big intersections I encountered a group of police men and women, directing emergency vehicles. They approached me, some of them crying, and asked me to pray for them. We had what looked like a "huddle" in the street, each one trying to find understanding in what had happened and strength in moving ahead. One of them asked me, "Father, tell us something, make some sense of this for us. We can't handle this." I don't remember what I said or if I said anything, but my presence as a priest at that moment seemed to help them, and their faith seemed to strengthen me.

As I passed through many layers of security and as I got closer to my residence, I met many more fire officials, police, and military. A number of them approached and asked me to pray for them and for everyone lost at Ground Zero.

Two young people asked to go to confession on the street. They felt compelled at that moment to seek the forgiveness of the Lord. I felt very blessed as a priest to offer them the Sacrament of Penance. I invited another to come into church with me and to have a chat. To my surprise there were already many people in church praying, seeking some meaning to what had happened.

In the days that followed, I would regularly visit local fire houses and offer prayers for firemen lost and missing. Although the firemen were most appreciative, their preoccupation was with their fallen brothers and sisters.

On one evening, shortly after this tragedy, we had an outdoor prayer service at a local park. More than 300 people participated. We processed to several fire houses as part of this prayer service. At each fire house

we prayed in English, Spanish, and Chinese and the firemen came out to join us. It was one of the most powerful community prayer experiences I have ever had.

I don't pretend to have done anything unusual or heroic following the events of September 11, 2001. I feel blessed that Christ placed me in this circumstance as a priest to be able to offer consolation to those who were hurting and in need of His mercy, or to offer some words of encouragement. Ultimately, it was a time of grace for me, a time to reflect on the great gift the Lord has given me in my own priesthood.





## Rev. Jeff Ethen

---

*Currently a Pastor of three parishes in Minnesota. He was ordained in 1988 in the Diocese of St. Cloud.*

The World Trade Center was to have been our early morning vacation destination on September 11, 2001. My tourist companion, Fr. Peter Kirchner, and I arrived from Minnesota late the night before. Lingered over a second cup of coffee, instead, the first jet struck. An accident? Best to keep out. Crowded, lower Manhattan didn't need two more gawkers. The second jet hit.

Now the city ordered onlookers away to make room for necessary personnel. We looked at each other. We were unnecessary. We went. Firefighters, law enforcement, and medical squads are trained to do certain things with their hands. So, too, are the hands of a priest. I never felt more needed or appreciated.

We hurried on foot from our 23rd Street guest house through two sets of police barriers. Our Roman collars gained immediate access. Police officers urged us onward. No ID checks. No questions. Absolute trust and respect.

We were directed to St. Vincent Hospital, near Ground Zero, which was about to receive the injured rescuers who survived the second tower collapse. Cardinal Egan, dressed in surgical scrubs, waited at the curb behind the hospital. There it was easier to accommodate the stream of ambulances through the loading dock, rather than under the front door canopy. The three of us were soon joined by a couple more chaplains. Thousands of civilian victims were expected. Extra beds were secured by discharging elective surgery patients and by setting up army cots on the nearby Chelsea Pier. The beds remained empty. There were few civilian survivors.

Most incoming ambulances contained one or more injured rescuers. Each was met by an emergency room crew and a chaplain. Physical triage was quickly assessed. There were a few deaths between the curb and operating rooms. Cardinal Egan, who had the oil stock, administered the anointing of the sick to them in addition to the severely wounded. The others required minor attention such as eye washes, lung clearings, bone settings, or rest.

Fr. Kirchner and I worked briefly as a team, but soon separated when the ambulance steam turned into a flood; four, six, eight, or more arrived at once, stopped briefly, then sped off for more. I offered brief prayers or blessings, scribbled telephone numbers to contact family members, and kept an eye on the less wounded firefighters who, once they regained their bearings, wanted to return to action. In all, 850 deliveries were made that day. My hastily cobbled diary recalled that first day as "mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually draining." We gave our all, or we gave nothing.

The hospital corridor was strewn with the rescuers' equipment and uniforms; ruined, or removed during triage. Another Catholic Chaplain, visiting from Australia, lost his Roman collar in the corridor debris before he realized it had fallen out. Without it, he was constantly confronted by security to leave. I didn't have an extra one, but wasn't about to give up mine and risk expulsion. Instead, I took a pair of surgical scissors and cut the collar in half.

By late afternoon, lower Manhattan filled with the victims' families searching for loved ones. They made repeated rounds of the city hospitals. Police street barriers made it difficult to approach St. Vincent. Some dashed across the street and pressed photographs or computer generated flyers into my hands before the police corralled them again. The pain and pleading was searing. I had the collar. Couldn't I look? They were gone before I could explain that, no, I couldn't. There was nobody to find. Ground Zero had con-

sumed them. The hospital respectfully kept the hundreds of photos and flyers, and installed a permanent exterior glassed-in Wall of Remembrance.

These family searches were exhausting and futile. Fr. Kirchner and I were selected September 12th as members of a 25 chaplain team working in the city's missing persons' bureau at Chelsea Pier. The bureau connected the families' information with the hospital lists. It was meant to relieve loved ones from aimless searches.

But what mother stops looking for her child? What spouse gives up? Naturally, the families wanted to maintain their rounds. The chaplains met individually with the relatives, looked them in the eyes and told them to go home. Stop looking. It was okay to quit. No guilt. It was over. The first time for me was tough. It never became easier.

Each time I silently offered a quick prayer for God's grace that the families accept the permission. I had never before performed an intervention meant to sever a relationship. All day I looked into expectant faces of parents, spouses, siblings, or grandparents, who awaited a word of hope from the man wearing the collar.

I had a lifetime of crisis ministry in those first two days. It was easy to slip into dark despair. Whenever I attempted to understand the crisis, the sense of abandonment and helplessness encroached. Only by serving others was it possible to rise above the desolation. Sleep was sporadic. Shut eye wasn't the difficulty. Jolting awake to the screaming sirens and the sudden recollection of where we were was traumatic every time I dozed off. I fought against the deep sleep which could release me. Waking was disorienting.

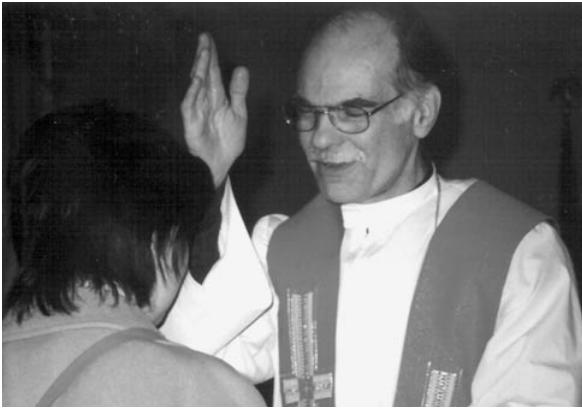
Fr. Kirchner and I were constantly approached by strangers who either lost or found faith in God. It was gratifying to be a priest. Religious and rescuers stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the esteem of the citizenry. There was no separation of church and state.

Construction workers and demolition experts arrived September 12th to take fifteen minute rotations at Ground Zero sifting through the rubble. One group of Irish Catholic union steel workers hailed me over for a blessing. They removed their hardhats and held them in forearms tattooed with black marker ID numbers. "You a Catholic priest?" they hollered. Indeed. "Lay it on us!"

Fr. Kirchner and I returned to New York for the anniversary. It was necessary for closure and to walk the halls of St. Vincent and celebrate Mass with the other rescuers. Cardinal Egan graciously invited us to con-celebrate the noon Mass at St. Peter's Church, across from Ground Zero. He remembered us as the "Minnesota Twins".

Priests don't need a September 11th to be effective. Any personal, pastoral need is critical for the Christian seeking it from the man in the collar. I was never more proud to be a priest than on September 11, 2001; but it affirmed my priestly vocation during the past fifteen years in rural Minnesota.

A month after I returned from the attacks, I spoke to fourth graders in a public school in southern Minnesota. A thank you note from the teacher mentioned one student, Dylan, who had gone Halloween trick-or-treating around his community. Most youngsters that year wore costumes of firefighters or police officers. Dylan, a Protestant, wore a Roman collar. His neighbors mistook him for a Lutheran minister. He corrected them proudly, "I'm a Catholic priest," he announced at each door. "I'm a hero."



## Rev. James P. Nieckarz, MM

---

*Currently an associate at Church of the Transfiguration in Manhattan.*

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Fr. Raymond Nobiletti, the pastor of the Church of the Transfiguration, Fr. Norm Walling, SJ, and I were having coffee in the dining room when the first plane struck. We thought it was a terrible accident. Soon after we heard the second plane and thought this is more than an accident. While we were watching the television to see what happened and discussing whether we should all go we received a call from the Chancery telling us we should go over to the World Trade Center. We left immediately.

When we arrived, people were being treated on the sidewalk opposite the towers and many were being taken away to hospitals. Fr. Raymond stayed in front of the building, while Fr. Norm and I decided to see where the triage center might be and go there to attend to victims being brought in. A policeman told us to go to St. Peter's on Barclay Street. We headed there right away. When we got there, they were removing the last person at St. Peter's because with the benches and so forth, it was determined that it would not be a good place for the many wounded that were expected. We were told that a triage center was going to be set up at West Street. We went to West Street next.

When we got to West Street, the scene was chaotic and we were told that nothing was set yet, but that a temporary triage center was now located at World Trade Center #5, so we headed a few blocks up to that site. We were just about to enter Building #5, when a couple of policemen came along shouting to everyone on the street, "Everyone run to the North, the tower is shaking and may come down."

We went around World Trade Center #5 and heard a loud rumbling roar behind us and walked north on Greenwich Street. Almost immediately debris and billowing smoke appeared on either side of us. Fr. Walling is ten years older than I am and could not run after getting to the north side of building #5. I was, at that moment, more concerned about his safety than what was happening behind us since we really didn't know what was happening. We were being protected by World Trade Center #5 and we walked steadily north as clouds of smoke and all sorts of things flew by on the streets east and west of us. At this point, we decided to continue to leave the area and head back to the parish as I had the noon Mass.

When we returned to Mott Street, we heard the first tower had fallen. Soon after someone came to tell me the second tower had collapsed.

The next day I went to St. Vincent's Hospital and volunteered to counsel family and friends who were turning up in the hundreds to get information on loved ones who may have survived. I finally felt useful; talking with the families probably did me more good than I could do for them. Their faith, courage and hope were remarkable for the most part. Sadly, many if not most, would not succeed in finding their loved ones. The thing that affected me the most, those early days was the dedication of so many medical, police, and fire personnel. In addition, there were many ordinary citizens who showed extraordinary kindness and generosity. The busy and sometimes rude city seemed transformed into a city of compassion. Many I know have become more compassionate, more thoughtful and perhaps more faithful and prayerful as a result of September 11, 2001. I thank God for them and for my guardian angel who seemed to be busy with me that day.



## Rev. John C. Petrich

*Currently the Chaplain at St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth, MN. He was ordained in 1983 in the Diocese of Duluth.*

The morning of September 11, 2001 was a normal morning until we saw the traumatic events unfold in New York. About 10:00 AM, I was called to the police department's emergency operation center in City Hall. There I found my partner and all of the brass from the Police and Fire departments with the mayor and all the other department heads. We watched the news and wondered as they worked to set up plans for essential services in the city. As the morning session came to a close our mayor turned to my partner John Hammack (Assembly's of God Pastor) and myself and asked, "When are you guys going?" We called the International Conference of Police Chaplain's Association office to see if there were needs. We were put on standby alert, and later in the week were asked when we could be in New York.

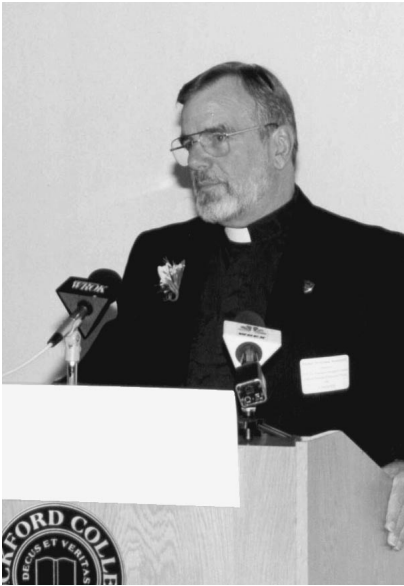
We were able to leave for New York at the end of September. We flew to Newark, New Jersey on September 30, 2001 to work with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as critical incident stress management people. We were teamed up with other chaplains, the stress teams from the Boston Police Department and the San Francisco Police Department. This team would respond to the needs of the Port Authority Police and civilian personnel as well as all of the Ground Zero personnel.

After a short orientation, I was called to celebrate Mass that evening with the Port Authority emergency operation center personnel. During the Mass my team was needed at Ground Zero as things were changing rapidly, as bodies were being found in the stairways of the rubble. After Mass I was whisked in a squad car to Ground Zero and sent to the temporary morgue. While there, bodies were being brought in and I prayed and blessed them. All night, I was impressed with the rituals and respect shown to the members of service and civilian that were brought in. Flags were wrapped around the bodies as they were sent off to the morgue in motorcades of ambulances and police cars. This was my post, most of the time being present, sharing prayers, and listening to the people working.



Two very inspirational moments for me happened early and late the same day. In the early afternoon one of the Boston police officers and I walked the perimeter of the pile and spoke and listened to the rescuers and recovery people. As I reflect on this, it was the intense purpose of these professionals. The machinery would stop and 15 to 20 workers would climb the pile and probe, look, and listen. Nine out of ten times the mission would find no one, but they would not give up, they felt frustration, but would speak of people under the debris and not stopping until they could bring closure to as many families as possible. Later that day a fire chaplain came up and asked if I was a Catholic priest, because a paramedic would like to talk to a priest. I went to the staging area at the water front and found the ambulances. These paramedics wanted to pray and many of them wanted to go to confession. We turned an ambulance into a confessional and I heard many confessions. Seeing people of faith clinging to their foundations and roots strengthened me in my resolve.

All week in New York I was reflecting about being there for others and keeping myself balanced to work and minister to others. This worked by calling upon my faith and my prayer life. Thursday of that week we were assigned to be present at the Port Authority Memorial Service at Madison Square Garden. That is where I felt the tragedy the most and it came during the singing of the song "Ave Maria". Tears welled up and I felt and found uneasiness in this mission, for this was more than a professional mission, it was life changing. That change is with me every day as I listen more intensely and act with more depth, bringing God's grace to His people. Part of this depth for me is the Rosary and the mysteries. While at Ground Zero, I prayed the Rosary and gave rosaries to all who wanted them.



## Rev. William R. Wentink

---

*Currently the Director of Pastoral Care at St. Anthony Medical Center in Rockford, IL and is a Chaplain with the Rockford Police and Fire Departments. He was ordained in 1970 in the Diocese of Rockford.*

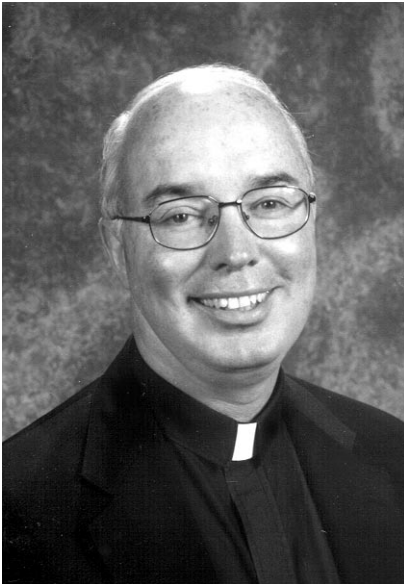
At approximately 5:30 AM on September 12, 2001, I received a call from the FBI asking if I would be available to respond to New York. Since July of 1996, the FBI has sent their Chaplains to major disasters in our country to be on the scene with FBI agents and emergency rescue personnel.

I arrived in New York on October 2, 2001 and immediately went to the FBI Command Post for Chaplains. I was assigned to the Morgue. While most of my time was at the morgue, I also spent time at Ground Zero and at the landfill on Staten Island. Arriving at the morgue, I reported to Captain Pat Boyle of the New York City Police Department. Within ten minutes of my arrival, Captain Boyle told me that a MOS (Member of Service—police officer or firefighter) would be arriving shortly at the morgue. He asked if I would offer a prayer and blessing for the MOS. There were approximately 125 people working at the morgue. Whenever a MOS was brought in all of these people stopped what they were doing and formed two lines on the street in front of the morgue. In a few moments eight police motorcycles followed by a FDNY ambulance came down the street. The ambulance stopped and everyone came to attention. The rear doors of the ambulance were opened and a stokes basket covered with an American Flag was brought out of the ambulance by New York firefighters and paramedics. I stepped forward and offered a prayer and a blessing. As I stepped back in line and the flag was being folded, I looked up at those standing at attention and saw that there was not a dry eye anywhere. This scene was repeated many times everyday.

One of the things that impressed me was the dignity and respect that was shown to those who were killed on September 11, 2001. Everyday at noon, I offered Mass in a tent at the morgue. Many of the police officers, firefighters, and medical examiners would stop their work to attend Mass. The Salvation Army was feeding workers 24 hours a day. One day the Salvation Army had small angel medals set out for the workers to take with them. For the next few days I must have blessed dozens of these medals. Police and firemen would bring the medals to me and ask for a special blessing for them and their families.

Being a Catholic priest from a different area of the country had its benefits. Many emergency personnel would talk about their particular experiences on September 11th. Many times I would hear confessions of the emergency workers in the areas by the morgue, Ground Zero, and the Staten Island landfill. When they knew I came from a long distance and would probably never see them again, they felt very comfortable opening up. When I asked the question, "Where were you on September 11th?", they would tell of rescuing many people, of watching people jump or fall from the World Trade Center buildings and then the nightmares that have been following.

It was a privilege and an honor to have been able to serve God's people in New York.



## Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Coyle

---

*Currently the Pastor at Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Bally, PA. He was ordained in 1980 in the Diocese of Allentown.*

I am a pastor of a rural parish and serve as a Chaplain for the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Immediately following the events of September 11th I was activated to care for families and staff affected by the attack on the Pentagon. It was a humbling experience that will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Following the events of September 11th the Pentagon established a Family Assistance Center at a hotel close to the Pentagon. The Center served as a valuable resource and support to the families of the Pentagon and airlines who were affected by this terrible tragedy in Washington.

At the Family Assistance Center Chaplains from all branches of the Armed Services worked 24 hours a day as a team to respond to the needs of the families. The Chaplains provided a ministry of presence to the families and staff who longed for comfort and hope in such a trying time.

What was most inspirational and moving was the room where the families gathered twice a day to receive information. It was holy ground. All around the huge room were tables where the families placed pictures and notes about their deceased loved ones. The pictures and notes spoke volumes. The pictures were of mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, grandparents, nieces and nephews, friends and neighbors, military and civilian. They were Americans like you and me. They were the best of the best - people of every race and creed, a cross section of our nation.

The walls of the room were covered with signs, letters, cards, quilts, and banners from all over the world from people who wanted to express their love. These notes were a tremendous support to the grieving families. In time, the room had become a sacred space made holy by the memory and tears for those who had died while serving our nation.

Sunday's Eucharist was celebrated in this special holy room. The normal Sunday Scriptures spoke clearly of God being with us in the midst of tragedy. Both the Scriptures and Eucharist were so powerful in comforting the families and staff. Through the ministry of others, God provided for his people.

The most difficult moment for me was leaving the Center on the last day after serving there a month. There was so much more to be done. However, now the families were returning to their local churches, synagogues, temples and communities where others would minister and care for them.

My work as a Chaplain following September 11th is the same work that a priest performs each day in a parish. Priests have the privilege of serving God's people at critical times of joy and sorrow.

## Rev. LaVerne L. Schueller

---

*Currently an auxiliary Chaplain at Eglin Air Force Base in FL. He is a retired Colonel in the US Air Force and former Command Chaplain at USSTRATCOM. He was ordained a priest in 1966 in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.*

A group of chaplains from the Air Force, Army and Navy, who serve as Command Chaplains in the unified commands, and our enlisted execs, were in conference room 1E801 inside the Pentagon. We had just been informed that the World Trade Center had been hit. Shortly thereafter, people who were sitting along the wall of our conference room felt a bump. They thought it was something in the air conditioning system. We were about to start our conference when someone came running into our area and shouted, "Evacuate the building."

Many of us thought that it was precautionary because of the New York situation. The evacuation was hurried, but very orderly. While I was still in the building I saw a man outside turn to his right and look up and behind. I wondered what he was looking at and when I, too, was outside I turned and looked back to the Pentagon. There I saw the most horrible plume of thick, acrid, black smoke pouring from the building like it was coming from the fires of hell. At that moment I realized that we had also been hit by a terrorist act.

Those of us who were there for the chaplain conference gathered in one area. Not long after we evacuated the building, the then Lt Gen Lance Lord, who was then Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force came out. He was telling everyone to leave, that there was nothing anyone could do. However, we chaplains stayed right where we were and said among ourselves no, we are not going because there will be things we can do here.

Soon, that area on the river side of the historic building became a medical triage collection point. Medics from inside the building began to bring the injured out of the smoke-filled terror to the grassy area on gurneys and stretchers. Our group helped in any way we could. We lifted people off the gurneys and placed them on stretchers on the ground so the gurneys could be returned for more injured. We held IV bags over patients on stretchers. We helped load injured into ambulances and civilian vehicles when there were no more ambulances available.

It was also in the triage area that I saw another kind of heroism and testimony to the goodness of the human spirit. I was holding an IV bag for a civilian female who was employed by the Army. One of her legs was burned, the other was broken. She had been administered a shot of Demerol. She was a Phillipina, so I thought the odds were pretty good that she was a Roman Catholic. I identified myself to her as a Catholic priest. Amid all that chaos, in spite of her own pain, she looked up at me and said, "Father, will you please get word to my husband that I am okay." She was not wallowing in self pity; she was reaching out of her pain in love.

There was confusion and some panic. More than once someone shouted that another unidentified aircraft was heading up the Potomac toward the Pentagon. They would shout things like "4 minutes out," "2 minutes out." Gratefully, these were false reports. But not long after that, an F-16 came roaring low over our area and banked toward the west. The four air-to-air missiles under each wing were very visible. I've seen lots of F-16s in my Air Force years. None ever looked as beautiful as that one! And a proud realization came through to me, that we were all united with that pilot who was flying that F-16. United, we were all part of the same force and we were facing this horror together.

When the injured were finally moved away to hospitals, a request was made for volunteers to go back into the building to search for injured and dead. I heard a female medic, who had been in the building, say: "There's no need for anyone to go back in there!" United, our chaplain group, along with others, volunteered to go back into the building. Each volunteer was issued a paper surgical mask, a pair of latex gloves, and a white hand towel. The towel was to be used over our nostrils and mouths to help block the acrid smoke that was filling the building, if the surgical masks failed.



We moved through horrendous, biting smoke back to the famous center courtyard of the Pentagon. I was the only Catholic priest in the chaplain group and specifically requested to be assigned to the "expectant" team in case there was a need for last rites. I saw many general officers among the group in the courtyard. I don't know where they came from, because they were not at our original triage area. But rank meant nothing. We were all united in the desire to do what we could. During this process we heard that another unidentified aircraft was heading our direction. This was a very frightening prospect. I have dedicated my entire adult life to trying to serve God and his people. But I am a man of many faults. However, at that point I was comforted by remembering Jesus' words, "Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for another." And the reason we were there was to help others. So if there was another aircraft coming in, that was the argument I was going to use in front of His judgment seat.

There was really nothing more we could do at that point, but we found it difficult to leave the area. Most of us were still trying to realize that it was real and not just some horribly surreal movie. Finally, we were directed to leave and decided to walk up the hill to our hotel. And on that walk, we saw the final path of that killer aircraft. The top of a light pole was knocked off on an overpass. The FBI had marked it as evidence. The top of a light pole had been knocked off on the street that goes by the Pentagon. It too was marked as evidence. And finally, it took out the entire light pole near the sidewalk. The very sidewalk on the west side of the building which I used for my power walk very early Tuesday morning, as I had each year that I've attended our Pentagon conference.

When we arrived at the hotel, we then realized that we had been running on adrenaline the entire day and were bone tired. But that night, we were informed that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness was establishing a crisis counseling center for families and friends of people who were listed as missing in the Pentagon.

On that first day, the people coming into that building wanted to speak with the chaplains, not with counselors.



## **Rev. Joseph McCaffrey**

---

*Currently the Pastor at Sts. John and Paul Parish in Sewickley, PA.  
He was ordained in 1987 in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

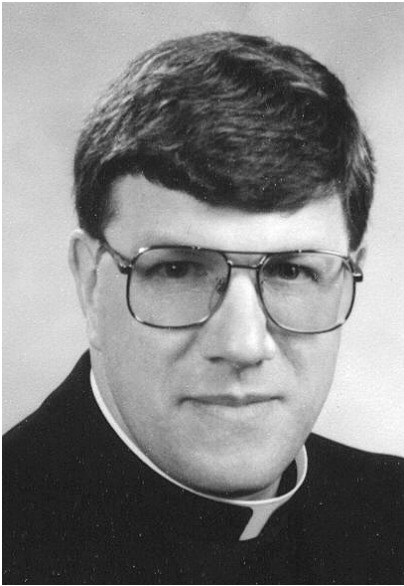
In 1991 the Federal Bureau of Investigation initiated a Chaplaincy Program. This was to be a volunteer chaplaincy involving all denominations to be certified and trained for the express assistance of FBI agents and personnel in the time of critical incidents and trauma. I was privileged to be among the first chaplains chosen for this unique and incredible ministry, and the first Catholic priest and chaplain for

the FBI Office of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My first critical incident was the US Air crash of Flight 427 near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. FBI agents were responsible for body part recovery and identification. I worked with those agents in the morgue area and provided support and debriefings for all personnel. Ten years later after participating in countless other critical incidents of all kinds the morning of September 11, 2001 brought an un-imaginable critical incident. An outrageous attack on all of humanity.

Within 24 hours of the crash of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, I was on the scene. My initial response was to be of assistance to all FBI agents and personnel, securing the crime scene and assisting with evidence and body recoveries. Almost immediately upon approaching the scene, I was requested by the FBI to assist United Airlines in providing counsel and support to the families of the victims. It became my main role to be a liaison between the FBI and United Airlines especially in regards to visits to the crash site by the victims' families.

United Airlines housed the family members of the victims at Seven Springs Resort. I was called upon to provide counseling and support and celebrate the Sacraments with any family members who were in need. I was also assigned the task of being a liaison between the FBI who were in control of the crime scene and any of the family members who wished to visit the crash site. I was privileged to make many private visits with family members to the crash site as well as the main visit which included several hundred family members and many dignitaries.

Because of the strong bonds formed during this critical time with many of the family members, the Justice Department requested that I assist the family members at Princeton University for a hearing of the cockpit voice recorder of United Airlines Flight 93. This again was an experience which I will never forget. I was privileged to listen, along with the family members, to the cockpit voice recorder. During these times of tremendous stress and trauma, bonds are formed between people which transcend our ordinary life experience. To this day I share a relationship with people from across the country and am in awe at the wonder of God who shows forth His magnificence by being able to bring tremendous good out of horrific evil.



## Rev. Sean Kevin Code

---

*Currently the Pastor of St. Agnes Catholic Church in Lock Haven, PA. He was ordained in 1993 in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.*

At St. Peter's rectory in Somerset, PA, we were like the rest of the nation and much of the world on the morning of September 11, 2001. The routine was interrupted by an alert from a parishioner, "turn on the television." The staff watched the live and taped broadcast of the two jetliners crashing into the World Trade Center, refusing to believe what we were seeing. Then we heard other reporters describe the unimaginable - a third airliner had crashed into the Pentagon.

Moments later, the local hospital called to say that a passenger jet had crashed nearby. The pastor, Msgr. Samuel J. Tomaselli, and I joined several other local clergy at the hospital. The trauma staff as well as the clergy waited uncomfortably outside the emergency room. Gowned and gloved,

some talked in subdued tones. But most of us, including myself, were quiet, struggling to put aside the "why" and "how" of what happened in order to prepare to minister to the needs of the expected 400 casualties. Shortly before noon, the on-site emergency teams informed the hospital that there were no casualties, no bodies, no plane - everything had vaporized on impact - and the crash site would be sealed as a crime scene. None of the clergy would be permitted to visit the site and pray for the dead. So we dispersed.

The memory of the sights of that day's events in New York and Washington was shocking. The thought that 400 more persons died as a result of this madness, and died less than 10 miles from where I live, numbed me. Only later that day did the world learn that there were 44 persons aboard Flight 93.

Like most churches in the Altoona-Johnstown diocese, St. Peter's held a prayer service that night. Msgr. Tomaselli reminded the parishioners that in the face of incomprehensible events, we can only find serenity in Jesus' presence in this life and the promise of his peace in the next.

In tragedies of this kind, the Red Cross is responsible for coordinating the spiritual as well as temporal care of the victims and their families. The staff of the Red Cross arrived in Somerset and immediately began organizing this effort. I volunteered to provide spiritual care for any of the victims' family members who might seek it.

On Friday, September 14, I was invited to be one of three ministers to conduct a prayer service at the crash site with the state's two U.S. senators - Rick Santorum and Arlen Specter - while President Bush and others were praying in Washington. I spoke between a Rabbi and a Baptist minister, and said a very short prayer from the graveside ceremony in the Church's funeral rite. Our prayers were offered with the local and national reporters assigned to the story. No one protested, no one charged a violation of the separation of state and church. The whole idea of a national day of prayer seemed completely appropriate; after all, God is the one we should turn to in times of trouble. Afterward, I met a Pittsburgh priest, Joe McCaffrey, who serves as chaplain to the FBI office there. He had arrived with the first team of investigators and handled all the prayers for the dead.

Family members and friends of the crash victims arrived in Somerset throughout the weekend and stayed at Seven Springs resort, about 25 miles from the crash site. On Monday, September 17, they traveled by bus to visit the crash site and attend a prayer service with Mrs. Laura Bush, Governor Tom Ridge and others. They went home the next day, as did Fr. McCaffrey, who had stayed with the families and ministered to them. A second, smaller group of family members arrived on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Red Cross planned for them to visit the crash site and pray together on Thursday, September 20. The Red Cross said they wanted a Catholic priest to accompany the families, be available to anyone seeking support, and to

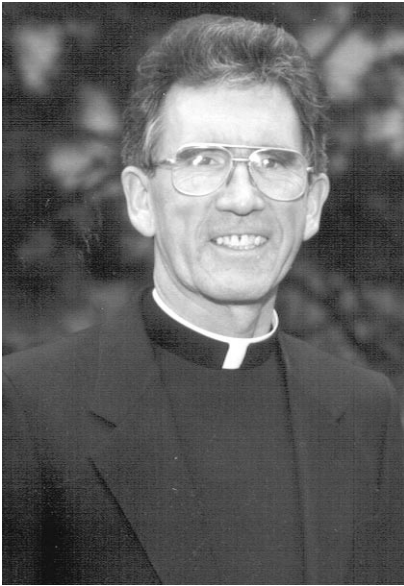
say a prayer at the memorial service. Because Fr. McCaffrey had gone home, they asked if I would do it. I accepted.

As the three buses drove through the towns and countryside, the signs of sympathy and support along the roadside offered much comfort. People waited at the roadside, forming an honor guard for the buses as they passed. Clearly, these family members and friends knew that they were not alone with their grief. The people of America and much of the world mourned with them, and prayed for them. I had a chance to speak to a couple of the families during our day together. In the face of an inexplicable horror, I had no idea what to say to comfort them.

During the day I met a number of people who were employees of United Airlines. They had volunteered to travel to any crash site and provide comfort to the families of the victims. I was impressed by their willingness to share the suffering of total strangers, a ministry so physically and emotionally draining. I was most surprised to learn that almost all of the team were people who had performed this ministry several times before. It was humbling to be in their presence.

During the 10 days after the crash, I experienced God's grace in several ways. In my discussions with the victims' family members, I realized that I was God's tool. The awkward words, the uncomfortable silences, the handshakes and hugs brought me closer to God as, I hope, I brought others closer to God.

In my discussion with the United Airlines team, I realized I was not alone in this ministry. God had invited a variety of people to fill the emptiness of these survivors with his presence. These and so many others responded with a compassion that touched not only the victims but the care-givers as well.



## **Rev. Msgr. Peter C. Moran**

---

*Currently the Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Northridge, CA. He was ordained in 1965 in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.*

I believe my priestly vocation is an empowerment by God to be his presence and strength in time of need. On the morning of September 11, 2001, it was only after the celebration of the 9:00 AM Mass that I was informed of the great tragedy. My reaction was shock and horror. After a quick look at the television in the rectory, my concern was for the children of the school, to help them deal with the reality of the day.

We celebrated an 11:00 AM Eucharist for peace. The faculty, staff, and the kindergarten children wore heart-shaped badges with a flag on the front made by the kindergarten children. Through my homily, I stressed to the children the power of God to comfort and heal wounds, and only through God's love could we obtain peace. Many adults were present at this Mass

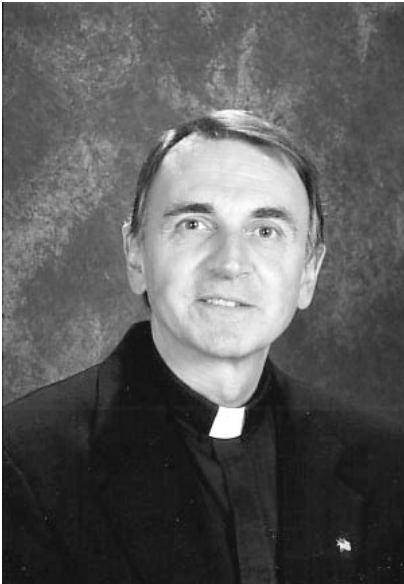
because they too had sought refuge in the church at this time of turmoil.

Again that evening, we celebrated the Eucharist with a full church. It was difficult in the homily to make sense of a senseless act but it seemed to me that the only answer was to love God, to draw close to him and to let His love direct and guide us.

On learning that this tragedy involved one of our own parishioners made it even more real. It was at the 6:30 AM Mass the next morning that the Eskandar family waited for me after Mass to inform me of the loss of their beloved son, Waleed. My first reaction was to call out to the parishioners, "Come over, come over, they lost their son." The assembly gathered around them and comforted them in the arms of Christ. It was this outpouring of love and solidarity that inspired me throughout the next days and weeks. Our morning Masses were filled and our Eucharistic Chapel was busy with parishioners praying for those who had died, their families, and for those who were putting their lives on the line searching the Trade Center.

It was on the following Friday evening that we again celebrated the Eucharist and celebrated the life of a remarkable young man. Once again, I was inspired by the faith and prayer of our parishioners who gathered to celebrate the life of a young man who was a stranger to them but who shared a place with them in the Body of Christ.

The priestly ministry is particularly important in times of crisis. How do you reach out to the intense level of grief? How do you meet the challenge to be a source of consolation to those with different needs? All I can say on looking back is that whatever comfort and counseling I was able to give to the Eskandar family and to the parish as a whole, was all the work of the Spirit.



## **Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski**

*Currently the Pastor of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Jersey City, NJ.*

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, began as usual with my celebrating morning Mass. After breakfast I left to take my car for a scheduled oil change. As I was driving from the rectory, located some three blocks from the Hudson River, I heard that a plane had hit one of the Twin Towers. I looked in my rear view mirror and could see smoke coming from the north tower. I assumed it must have been a small private plane. Unsure of what to do, I continued driving. Then a radio report announced that a plane had struck the south tower. I instantly made a U-turn and headed back to the rectory. The Twin Towers were directly in my line of sight as I drove east toward the Hudson River. Thick, evil, black smoke was pouring from them and fear was pouring into my heart.

I arrived at the parish just two or three minutes before the streets became clogged with cars and people. As I drove into my garage, I saw a man pull on our locked church doors. From that moment, I began to move on automatic. It seemed that I instinctively knew what to do. Or perhaps looking back, God knew what to do. I just had the sense to be His instrument.

I immediately pushed open the doors of the church. Then I hurried to our grammar school located three blocks from the rectory to check on the students. Since the principal was not scheduled to arrive until the afternoon, I knew someone had to take charge. I visited each classroom to privately inform each teacher what was taking place. Each announcement brought a look of disbelief, panic, and fear to a teacher's face. I told the teachers to keep the students locked in the building until a parent or relative arrived to take them home.

I then went to the roof of the school from which I could see red flames shooting out of the windows of the Towers and that ugly, evil smoke. I told the panic stricken workers who were fixing a roof problem to go home. When I returned to the office I was met by five men in their twenties, asking if they could use the phone. They had been in the Trade Center area and in a bid to escape; they had jumped into the Hudson River, been picked up by a police boat, and brought to our side of the river. "Father, could we use a phone? We want to call our homes."

I returned to the church. The staff and I went to the hall below the church to make it an emergency rest area. There were now thousands of people going through our waterfront neighborhood, all headed away from the Hudson River. I was then told the second tower had fallen.

I sent staff members to get food from local restaurants and stores. Sister Christyn, our pastoral associate, and I began to walk through the neighborhood posting flyers announcing our church was a place for people to come. As I was attaching signs to the poles, I realized that my hands were shaking.

We then decided to celebrate Mass. On September 11th we celebrated Mass at noon. This unannounced, unscheduled Mass was attended by 75 dazed office workers. All of us there needed to feel the touch of God. We needed to affirm that Christ was our light. In the "darkness" of that noon hour, His light shone in the liturgy.

As the afternoon progressed, people came to seek consolation in church and comfort in the rest area we had so quickly set up. We had workers from Manhattan. We had residents from Battery Park City. We had folks from a hotel in Manhattan who arrived in their sleep wear. And we had 22 students from the High School of Economics and Finance, located next to the Trade Center. They had been brought by ferryboat across the river and deposited in Jersey City. They literally had no idea where they were. They told me that when they were ordered to get out of the school, they had just run for their lives and headed for the river.

Later in the day, I walked to the Hudson River since there had been a call for clergy. I saw hundreds, thousands of people being brought across the river on ferries and on any other type of boat that could hold passengers. I spoke to some people, but there was little to do, but be present. I was later told that just the sight of a Roman collar was a comfort. Perhaps, a sign Christ was shining in the darkness.

I returned to the church hall and we began to make accommodations to house the folks who could not get home. We found housing for 18 teenagers, and 21 adults, including Sylvia, an 87-year-old Jewish woman from Battery Park City who ended up staying at our convent.

The next day we again held an unscheduled Mass at Noon, and then again on Thursday. Friday, the National Day of Prayer, we kept our church open all day. We celebrated Mass at Noon and held a Prayer Service at 6:30 pm that was filled with parishioners and neighbors. Each service began with our singing, "Christ, Be Our Light."

Thursday and Friday afternoon we organized a brigade of volunteers to make lunches for the rescue workers. We sent people out for bread, meat, soda, chips, fruit, etc. Then we used our church hall to make a thousand bagged lunches each day. We carried them the three blocks to the riverfront. There the ferries that had been used to evacuate people on Tuesday were now being used to bring food and supplies to Ground Zero.



## ON THE COVER

---

*New York firefighter Patrick Burns presents the helmet of fire chaplain Franciscan Father Mychal F. Judge to Pope John Paul II November 10, 2001. Father Judge died in the World Trade Center attack while giving last rites to a firefighter at the scene. During a Mass at St. Peter's, the Pope prayed for the firefighters and their families.*

---

© CNS PHOTO