As we mark the tenth anniversary of the events of September 11, The Episcopal Church continues to work for healing and reconciliation. Americans experienced the first large non-domestic terrorist attack on our own soil that day, a reality that is far too much a present and continuing reality in other parts of the world. We joined that reality in 2001. Many people died senselessly that day, and many still grieve their loss. All Americans live with the aftermath – less trust of strangers, security procedures for travelers that are intrusive and often offensive, and a sense that the world is a far more dangerous place than it was before that day. Our own nation has gone to war in two distant places as a result of those events. The dying continues, and the world does not seem to have become a significantly safer place.

Yet we believe there is hope. People of faith gave sacrificially in the immediate aftermath of the plane crashes, trying to rescue those in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, trying to subdue the aggressors on the plane over Pennsylvania, and reaching out to neighbors and strangers alike on that apocalyptic day. Clergy and laity responded to the crisis in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania, and prayer services erupted in churches and communities across the nation. St. Paul’s Chapel, near the site of the Towers, opened its doors to the emergency responders, and volunteers appeared with food and socks, massaging hands and praying hearts. Volunteers continued to staff the Chapel for months afterward, and prayers were offered as human remains were sought and retrieved in the ruins of the Towers.

Church communities in many places began to reach out to their neighbors of other faiths, offering reassurance in the face of mindless violence. That desire for greater understanding of other traditions has continued, and there are growing numbers of congregations engaged in interfaith dialogue, discovering that all the great religions of the world are fundamentally focused on peace. The violence unleashed on September 11th and in its aftermath was the work of zealots, disconnected from the heart of their religions’ foundations.

This tenth anniversary is above all an opportunity for reflection. Have we become more effective reconcilers as a result? Are we more committed to peace-making? The greatest memorial to those who died ten years ago will be a world more inclined toward peace. What are you doing to build a living memorial like that?

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