

DIOCESAN NEWS

Waves of tragedy ripple through lives of citizenry

Parishioners throughout the Diocese of Rochester told their own personal stories about the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington Sept. 11 to the Catholic Courier. While some awaited word of relatives, friends and former classmates, others told of escapes from danger. Still others answered the call for help in the rescue efforts. And a former diocesan resident who converted to Islam reported from Egypt on the reactions there.

The disasters in New York City prompted Becky McCorry into unprecedented action in her work with the Red Cross.

McCorry, a parishioner of the Newman Community at SUNY Brockport, serves as emergency services director for the Greater Rochester chapter of the Red Cross. Because she is also the state Red Cross disaster lead — the point person for an incident such as the World Trade Center tragedy — she was sent immediately to New York City.

"It's like a war here. It's something that I had hoped, in my lifetime, I would never experience," McCorry said in a Sept. 13 telephone interview from the Red Cross headquarters on Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan.

McCorry said she arrived in New York City around 7 p.m. Sept. 11. She immediately set to work organizing relief efforts to provide mental health services, food and water, and shelter space. In her first two days there, she said, she slept approximately four hours.

"We've got thousands of displaced people," she said. "The entire city is traumatized; it will be a very rare person who isn't."

More than 48 hours after the terrorist attack, McCorry said the city was still in massive disarray, noting, "The biggest challenge is communication. The telephone lines are tied up."

Because she and Red Cross staffers had never previously covered a disaster of this nature, she said, "We don't know quite what we're dealing with. Nothing is typical, that's the challenge."

McCorry said she wasn't sure how long

she would be in New York. She emphasized that the city's recovery process will be slow at best.

"Everybody needs to recognize that we're going to need help seven days from now, 14 days, 21 days and 28 days. This city is never going to be the same," she said.

Sister of St. Joseph Elaine Hollis, a chaplain at St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell, also went to New York City to provide crisis counseling. Sister Hollis went to the University of New York Medical Center on Sept. 12.

One of the survivors of the twin towers attacks was Timothy Coughlin, 29. He is the son of Tom Coughlin, a former parishioner at St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church in East Bloomfield, head coach of professional football's Jacksonville Jaguars. Timothy was baptized at St. Bridget's. His grandmother, Betty Coughlin, attends St. Mary's Church in Waterloo where her son, Tom, went to elementary school.

Timothy was working on the 60th floor of the second tower to be hit when he decided to exit the building after seeing the first tower struck by a hijacked plane, his grandmother said. Coughlin made it out of the second building just after it was hit by the second plane. His brother, Brian, had contacted him from Florida by cell phone while he was on the 29th floor making his way down, and then spoke to him again after he had exited the building. By the time the twin towers started collapsing, the Coughlins knew Timothy was safe, she said.

"We all have many blessings," she said.

Greg Woodard, a former basketball star at McQuaid Jesuit High School and Villanova University, was in his office at J. P. Morgan Chase on Wall Street, five or six blocks from the trade centers, when the plane crashes occurred.

"When the first building was hit, we just

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Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

An ecumenical healing

Elaine Brown, a member of the Victor United Methodist Church, holds her daughter, Jennifer, 10, during an ecumenical prayer service held at St. Patrick's Church in Victor Sept. 14. Clergy from five Victor-area churches participated.

Religious leaders urge nation to resist vengeful temptations

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

Bells tolled, candles burned, people prayed and religious leaders were urging the United States to proceed slowly and thoughtfully.

The very evening of the Sept. 11 attack on America, more than 15 clergy and laypeople stood together to lead hundreds of gatherers at Brighton's Temple B'rith Kodesh, in what has been called a "shock service," a memorial service and a service of solidarity.

As Brighton police guarded the driveway entrances and entrances to the synagogue, and also stood at the back of the sanctuary, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and Protestants took turns reading Psalms and other readings, and led singing with the congregation of Sikhs, Muslims, Jews and Christians.

Parishes throughout the diocese opened doors for individual prayer, prayer services and special services. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided over a special Mass the night of Sept. 11 at Sacred Heart Cathedral,

where 800 prayerful gathered. And at a WXXI/Democrat and Chronicle public forum the night of Sept. 13 at Nazareth College, the bishop noted that the day's Gospel reading at morning Mass was from Luke 6:27-38, on Jesus' sermon to love one's enemies, "Do good to those who hurt you ... do not return violence for violence."

It is a challenge, he said, to come to grips with such messages. But he made it clear, as have other religious leaders, that while seeking justice, "Our best response does not include more killing." The auditorium immediately responded in applause.

Bishop Clark noted that when he saw images of New York City under attack, it brought to mind faces of Iraqi children, innocent victims of bombings.

Rabbi Laurence Kotok, who hosted the B'rith Kodesh service, was also a panel guest at the forum, where he stated, "We in America have been ambivalent about terror around the world. ... We need to be realistic about what people around the world live with."

He added, "We need to stand up as moral and ethical representatives of justice."

By mid-week Father Dave Bonin was already praying for innocent victims likely to be killed in the United States' retaliation for the Sept. 11 killings.

"I'm not saying we shouldn't do something," he said. "But who is going to get hurt? The innocent people." Father Bonin is pastor-in-residence at St. Mary of the Lake, Watkins Glen, and St. Benedict, Odessa.

Father Jim Hewes, pastor of St. John's

and St. Patrick's parishes in Clyde and Savannah, wrote a long letter to his parishioners, including it with the latest newsletter, and asking for their reflection. "I am writing because I am concerned that a poll taken this week states that 86% of Americans would support a violent strike against the terrorists, even if this meant going to war," he stated. "This troubles me that 86% of Catholics might hold this same view."

"It is natural to respond to violence with rage and revenge," Father Hewes wrote, "but the only hope for us to stop the spread of the fires of violence is to live the way of Jesus' non-violent love that continues to offer love and forgiveness to every person, even one's enemy. ... The Just War Theory was never taught by Jesus ..."

Father Ron Gaesser, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Ithaca, was anticipating that some parishioners might walk out during his weekend homily because of his comments. "No one is asking the right question," he said. "Why are we so hated that people are willing to spend years of their life preparing themselves to strike back at us and sacrifice their own lives in the effort?"

He said that while he understood American's grief, he added, "But there seems to be an overreaction. I put it down to the fact I've lived through five wars, though it doesn't depreciate the value of life."

"Till we settle the problems in the Middle East, it is going to continue. It is complex. I don't have answers. I just ask the question, 'Why are we so hated?'"

He planned to use the Book of Job to discuss innocent suffering and the question of

"Where is God in all of this?" as well as Jesus as God's answer to violence.

"I guess I would work on changing our policies," he added, noting Scripture has references to right relationships. Relationships should not only be reviewed in the Third World, he said, but also the fourth and fifth.

Deacon Michael Mahoney, pastoral administrator of St. Mary of the Assumption, Scottsville commented, "History has shown when we strike out of passion and rapidly, you are sorry afterwards." He agreed with Bishop Clark that this should be a time of prayer and thought first.

"I would be very disappointed to know one week later we'd be launching warheads," he said. Deacon Mahoney is a retired U.S. Marine Corps major, who has done work in the area of terrorism, insurgencies and counterinsurgencies.

"In general our military forces are designed for conventional and perhaps even large-scale nuclear warfare," he said. "So when you start talking about terrorism, insurgency and counterinsurgency, the problem is conventional forces are not trained to deal with that."

He was shocked to see the World Trade Center towers fall and the Pentagon hit, he said. But, he said that in a world touched by sin, "It's what we live in and see. ... The face of tragedy is just different, and seen in a different place in the world."

"People saying we should immediately strike doesn't solve the problem ... We should bring these people to justice and they should know humankind will not tolerate this kind of activity."

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