

WORLD & NATION

Priest helps at Pentagon

By Linda Busetti
Catholic News Service

ARLINGTON, Va. — Father Stephen McGraw's wrong turn on his way to Arlington National Cemetery the morning of Sept. 11 took him directly under the flight path of a hijacked airliner that seconds later slammed into the Pentagon.

The recently ordained priest, parochial vicar at St. Anthony Parish in Falls Church, was sitting in traffic near the Pentagon around 9:35 a.m. when he noticed that "without warning a plane passed 20 feet over the cars, clipping a light pole," before plowing into the Pentagon.

He took oils for anointing the sick from his glove compartment, grabbed his stole and book for the care of the sick, left his car and ran to the front lawn of the Pentagon.

Right away, he said, about six to 10 injured and burned victims were brought out. Father McGraw told the injured that Jesus was with them, and he anointed one seriously burned man lying on his back who told the priest he was Catholic.

He prayed with others who were injured, including a woman who asked the priest to tell her parents that she loved them.

After the first half hour, there were no more injured to minister to, so he and the other chaplains waited as the fire continued to burn inside the Pentagon.

Father McGraw was joined by Father Francis deRosa, parochial vicar at Arlington's Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, who had parked his car and walked to the Pentagon. By afternoon, military officers invited Father McGraw and deRosa to the Pentagon's inner courtyard where mental health workers were assembled and a mortuary was being set up. There, the priests prayed the rosary for the victims.

"I realized this was where I was meant to be. This was where God wanted me," Father McGraw said.

Pakistani priest fears big backlash

By Stephen Steele
Catholic News Service

FRIBOURG, Switzerland — Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan have threatened to attack Christian churches if their government assists the United States in its search for Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden, said the director of the Pakistani bishops' human rights office.

Father Khalid Rashid Asi, the director, said fundamentalist groups have issued a warning to Pakistani President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar that if he allows the United States to use Pakistani air space or allows U.S. ground troops to attack Afghanistan from Pakistan, the fundamentalists will attack Christian churches and buildings.

"The fundamentalists see us as being from America. They see America as being a Christian country, so they believe that we receive all our funding and support from the United States," Father Asi said.

"For us, violence is our daily bread. Death is always around the corner," Father Asi told Catholic News Service in Fribourg, where he was attending the Union of International Catholic Press world congress.

Bin Laden, based in Afghanistan, is believed to be one of the masterminds behind Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Pakistan sealed its borders with Afghanistan and sent a delegation to warn the Afghan government of the danger of a possible U.S. attack.

Father Asi said he was in his Faisalabad home when he heard the news of the attacks. He said that at that moment he feared a backlash against Pakistan's Christians if the United States retaliated against a Muslim country.

"Muslims have the concept that all Muslims are one community. All Muslims are brothers. They cannot attack another Muslim," Father Asi said.



Reuters/CNS

Passersby leave money with Afghan refugee children in a cart on a road near the Pakistani city of Peshawar Sept. 18. Pakistani officials were fearing a flood of refugees from Afghanistan amid worries of a U.S. retaliation against the country.

"Fundamentalists believe that they are in a holy war with the West. If they (Westerners) fight Afghanistan, then they are fighting other Muslims. They won't allow America to invade Afghanistan from Pakistan," he said of the fundamentalists.

Father Asi said he was informed by telephone Sept. 17 by a worker in the human rights office of the threat against the Christian churches. He said Pakistani police have been dispatched to guard Christian buildings and places of worship.

The priest said that in the days following the attacks, many Muslim groups expressed solidarity with the United States.

"But there were fundamentalist groups that said it was good that something had happened to a superpower. They said, 'Maybe now the United States will understand what human rights means,'" Father Asi said.

Asi said. "There's a lot of anger in Pakistan against the United States" over some aspects of its foreign policy concerning Islamic peoples.

Father Asi said that threats against Pakistan's Christians occur every time a Muslim country is in conflict with the United States.

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