



Engage!

A Publication for the Friends
of the Atlantic District Mission Society

Summer 2011 Special Issue: Remembering 9/11

REMEMBERING by Rev. Dr. David H. Benke

Engaging the World with the Gospel of Hope - those words had been buzzing in my head over the weekend prior to Tuesday, September 11, 2001. After a period of recovery from a mild heart attack at the Missouri Synod's Youth Gathering in New Orleans at the beginning of August, I felt ready to return to work fully invigorated. So when I got to the Atlantic District office in Bronxville early in the morning for our first post-Labor Day staff meeting, I set about preparing a document on how our new theme would be that of Gospel engagement. At around 8:50, Pastor Bill Wrede interrupted my preparations with the news that an airplane had hit one of the Twin Towers. He wanted permission and encouragement to head into Manhattan, which I gave. He became the first person to embody the new theme, as he anointed the heads of Christian firefighters with the oil of blessing on West Street and Chambers prior to their entering the burning towers.

For me, like most others, it was a day on the road. Our meeting was shortened dramatically. I told the group that our ministry had been changed in an instant, and that our work in conjunction with the new theme would be severely tested by the force of evil that had now afflicted us. After prayers and sending forth of all around 10 AM, I headed for Queens and became the last "regular" vehicle allowed over the Throg's Neck Bridge. I stopped on that bright sunlit day in the middle of the span and got out of the car. There I saw, and felt, and inhaled the smoke and devastation of the now-crumbled towers. Then it was down the highways to Cypress Hills, Brooklyn and St. Peter's Lutheran Church and School, where parents arrived covered in soot, like "snowmen," to grasp their precious, badly frightened children in their arms. The school director, Clara DelValle, I and the staff prayed and prayed and prayed with those families, one by one. The baseline fear, realized forty three times in our Lutheran schools, not at St. Peter's, was that dad or mom who worked in lower Manhattan would not arrive.

I was on the phone with Bishop Stephen Bouman of the Metropolitan Synod of the ELCA. We determined that I'd preside over the south side of the bridges and he would take care of Manhattan and north; so my next assignment on September 11 was to visit and encourage those at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn. I got there via the Belt Parkway, which was closed to all but military traffic, and me. It was an eerie drive, all alone on that normally overcrowded thoroughfare, and after the dogleg turn around the corner of Brooklyn revealed the smoking devastation in lower Manhattan again, I exited to find a hospital full of trained disaster triage workers waiting to assist the wounded, and fearing the worst - that thousands and thousands had perished. Again, prayers were offered from the emergency room entrance to the cafeteria to the hallways. I returned home very late that night.

Three days later Bishop Bouman and I co-founded the agency that became Lutheran Disaster Response of New York. Under the initial executive leadership of John Scibilia, LDRNY's "Comfort and Renew" programs operated under the national auspices of Lutheran Disaster Response and executive Gil Furst became, for the next eight years, the hallmark of faith-based disaster response in New York City.

Within the next two weeks, I was fully immersed in engaging the world with the Gospel of hope, with collaborators and partners and ministries of encouragement to the families of victims and their forming association, at the funerals of the fallen, to the children whose parents never came to pick them up, with agencies like Lutheran Schools Association and Lutheran Counseling Center and Lutheran Social Services, with FEMA and the City of New York, with the Council of Churches, with Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki, and the emerging inter-faith disaster network.

And on Sunday, September 23, I answered the Mayor's call for A Prayer for America at Yankee Stadium.

One blessed outcome of that prayer was the Witness in the Public Square Luncheon. 30 honorees through the last 9 years have given magnificent evidence of the power of public witness of the Gospel through word and deed. God has been honored and given the glory. Lives have been enriched. Mission to the hurting and the lost has been accomplished. Through my own times of weakness and discouragement in the intervening years, the grace of God has been revealed to me each and every day in His Word, in the blessing of the Sacrament, in the love of my wife, Judy, my family and families of faith, and in the self-giving love of others.

From my perspective, then, Engaging the World with the Gospel of Hope is more than a motto. It's become the theme of my own life under the cross. I pray that all who read this are engaged for the sake of Christ with the world God loves in this significant autumn of 2011.



In this edition, we have asked our four honorees for the *Special 9/11 Remembrance Witness in the Public Square Luncheon* to share their stories with us. Their presence that day enabled them to be used by God in three unique ways. Chaplain Stephen Unger of the Federal Bureau of Investigation represents the first responders. Mr. Harrison Oellrich who escaped the towers represents the survivors. Mr. Lee Ielpi, whose son gave his life in the attack and Miss Jennifer Adams of the Tribute Center represent the victim's families.

An Interview with a First Responder: Chaplain Stephen Unger



What was your role going into the fall of 2001?

I was a Chaplain with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the New York Office. I was also the Director of Chaplaincy Services at Stony Brook Medical Center and Associate in Ministry at St. James Lutheran Church in St. James.

Where were you on the morning of September 11th?

I had just returned from a long night at the hospital. My pager started beeping and I was told to come into Manhattan as there was a terrorist attack in progress. I quickly headed to the city. The reality of the situation hit me on the way as I received a message from a hospital colleague begging me to help her. She said "Steve find my babies" as both her daughters were in the towers. This woman continued to call me every day for the next two weeks but both her "babies" never came home. When I reached Queens, the roads were blocked and no one was

getting through. I stopped at NYPD Highway 3 where I showed them my credentials and told them that I was to report downtown. A police lieutenant arranged for a squad car to escort me down there and I arrived shortly after the second tower had come down.

What was your experience as you arrived on the scene?

An FBI agent was walking up the street toward me. He was covered in ash and so dazed he did not know his name or what had happened to him. I took him to the FBI office 4 blocks away and met another agent. He told me he had been with a colleague and when the towers came down he ran left and the other guy ran right and he wanted us to try to find him. We headed back there but the heat was so intense we could not get close. This man was never found. As we were near St. Peter's Catholic Church, I took some people inside with me to pray for those who were lost or trapped inside the towers. By the altar there was a body covered in a shroud. A stole and some credentials lay on top. I read the credentials and saw they were for my dear friend and colleague, Father Mychal Judge. I pulled back the shroud and looked at his face. We had talked six weeks prior and the impact of what was happening became very real and very personal. A Bible verse came to my mind, "a shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." Father Judge had been the chaplain for the firefighters and he was the first to die and his death certificate read 0001. The firefighters believed he was taken first in order to welcome into heaven all the other firefighters that were to lose their life that day.

As you served there for the next three months, what was the chief need you were trying to meet?

In the midst of all this physical and spiritual darkness, people needed to know that God was still present. In Psalm 139:12, David writes, "even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to you". I needed to be with them so they knew they were not alone; that God and the church were there ministering with them. When President Gerald Kieschnick visited, he asked me what Bible verse came to mind as I worked down there. I shared with him 2 Corinthians 3:3, "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." I lived it with them as God through Jesus became flesh for us; I needed to do this for others.

In what ways did you see God's grace at work during that time?

God's grace was seen in the rescue. This may have been the greatest loss of life from a terrorist attack in American history but it was also the greatest rescue. God was seen in every uniform, using people to be His hands extended there. I felt that He was so close; I could have turned around and seen Him right by my shoulder. He put it in people's hearts to be heroic. I knew it was not by my own strength but it was God's strength and to His glory. God was present every day, sustaining, comforting and loving us all.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY by Harrison Oelrich



Beginning with a dull roar, a whoosh and a thud, followed immediately by thousands of papers raining down outside from above, I had absolutely no idea of the events beginning to unfold around me as I sat in my office on the 51st floor of 2 WTC looking over the harbor on that beautiful morning.

On a quick call from home discussing an issue with a contractor working at our LI home, I distinctly remember saying “I’ve got to go, I think something bad is happening”, slamming down the phone and running out of my office to see what was happening on the floor. Getting to the west windows, an unhurt but shaken colleague sitting by her shattered window was certain she had seen a piece of an airplane strike her window as it whizzed past. This was more than enough as I instantly had this overwhelming sense of needing to be elsewhere and quickly!

Perhaps having also experienced the WTC bombing in 93’ and remaining behind inside the smoke filled towers to attend to an injured co worker back then and having the catalyst of three beautiful and recently adopted young children at home, I simply knew I needed to go. We could always return later if what was happening wasn’t so bad...but somehow, I simply knew that I needed to leave, and fast. In retrospect, I’ve

realized that this was God’s hand, the work of the Holy Spirit guiding me to leave and with great dispatch.

A quick shout down the hallway to encourage others to join my 51 floor evacuation, but only a very few choosing to join my hasty exodus and fewer others still were in the stairwell which was eerily quiet as we wound our way down. In reasonably good shape and unimpeded in the trip down, we reached ground level in only seven or eight minutes and were met by a totally incomprehensible scene. Debris, some burning or smoldering and with additional pieces raining down, the undercarriage of an airplane with huge misshapen wheels smoldering in a corner.

I headed across lower Manhattan to a clients office which coincidentally directly faced the WTC complex to catch my breath, to try and process all of this, to reconnoiter and figure out next moves. A small group had gathered in his office, watching in horror as the upper floors of both towers were now fully aflame, but we could never have anticipated what was to come next....a ringing telephone from another acquaintance who also did business with this client, having the presence to call the office even though cut off, frightened and trapped from being able to evacuate his offices on one of the floors in the mid nineties of my building by the inferno raging several stories below. Knowing I knew the towers well from working there for many years, I was asked to and spent the next 45 minutes with the others speaking with him, trying to provide whatever advice I could and doing our best to reassure him that if he could just avoid being overcome by the smoke, the fires below could and would be extinguished and he would be evacuated from the roof later....the conventional wisdom at that time. How misguided and wrong this advice turned out to be though, as we suddenly watched and listened in absolute horror as the building collapsed and the phone line went dead in mid sentence!

I was completely devastated and totally unnerved....one minute perhaps thinking that this was why we had been put in this place and the next realizing I had just seen and heard an acquaintance perish along with so many others in a totally unthinkable way and after giving him such bad counsel. It took many weeks and months to fully recover from this shock. I remember thinking how could our loving and compassionate Lord allow such things to happen. However, over time I’ve been able to make peace with this event and have realized that perhaps He did put us there for a very special purpose....to provide comfort, hope and compassionate human voices on that phone line to be with another soul during his last terrifying minutes in this world!

What the other survivors and I did that day was not heroic. We were just able to get away from those buildings quickly enough to be here today. This has given us the succeeding years with our families, with our loved ones and to continue our life’s work. For me at least, it has truly enabled, facilitated, and seemingly even dramatically accelerated God’s work through my life and with it my drive to do this work and to do it gladly. As for all of those who perished on that terrible day, I now take comfort in the words of scripture, particularly in the words of Revelation 7: 9-17, where the vision of the “Multitude In White Robes” describes many from every tribe and nation having come out of their tribulation and who will suffer no longer, sitting next to the Lamb, who will lead them to springs of still water and with a God who will wipe away their every tear!

SAVE THE DATE



Witness In The Public Square

10 Year Anniversary of 9/11

We remember . . .

Tuesday, October 18th 2011

Would Your Church Like To Buy A Table?

Contact Carol Mittelstaedt at (914) 337-5700 X6

or Carol.mittelstaedt@ad-lcms.org



THE ATLANTIC DISTRICT
LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD

171 WHITE PLAINS ROAD, BRONXVILLE, NY 10708

www.ad-lcms.org • (914) 337-5700



Help for the Victim's Families

by Lee Ielpi and Jennifer Adams

In November 2001, the September 11th Families' Association was incorporated by family members who lost loved ones on 9/11. Primarily started by firefighter widows to share information and establish a communication network among families, the Association filled an information void for all family members including parents, children, and siblings who were not the immediate next of kin.

In 2002, the Association created a communication vehicle. CEO Jennifer Adams explained *"We realized it was necessary for the families to be informed. We needed a direct communication vehicle to convey information about the real issues not just the headlines."* Soon after officials from the Lutheran Disaster Response (LDRNY) met with the Association and offered support to this untraditional but necessary organization. LDRNY's support enabled the Association to begin publication

of the quarterly TRIBUTE newsletter in July 2002. This vital and consistent communication addressed the real issues such as the recovery of loved ones, development of memorials, legislation, support programs, and ways to connect with other families. With help from LDRNY TRIBUTE newsletter proved successful and today over 4,000 family members (including the Pentagon and families who lost loved ones on Flight 93 over Shanksville, PA).

Adams attributes this success in part to LDRNY's unique approach to finding ways that complimented the traditional disaster support agencies. *"Most agencies created a matrix that defined the population and traditional needs they would address. However, nothing about 9/11 was traditional and LDRNY, Bishop Benke, and Bishop Bowman, recognized that fact and worked very hard to understand the population's needs. Their essential early support paved the way for long term recovery."*

In 2004, while many 9/11 service organizations were closing, the Association broadened its mission and created the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, a museum where the 9/11 community (family members, survivors, rescue and recovery workers, volunteers and neighborhood residents) can volunteer and share their experiences with the public. The Tribute Center opened in September 2006 and has welcomed over 2 million visitors from around the world.

The Association credits much of the success to the generosity of the Lutheran community. As Association President and 9/11 family member Lee Ielpi explained, *"I cannot bring back my son and we cannot change the past, but we can work to make tomorrow a better day for my children and our grandchildren. I thank the Lutheran Church for their support of all of our families at a time when we needed help. The programs you enabled us to build continue to grow and are making a sustained impact."*

Visit the Tribute Center online at www.tributewtc.org. When you are in New York, please stop by and visit the Tribute Center at 120 Liberty Street, NY, NY 10006.

Atlantic District Task Force on Communications Announces Mini-Grants

The Communications Task Force (TF #6) would like to help congregations and ministries communicate better with mini-grants of \$500 to \$1,000. We have money allotted for several grants in the 2011 Budget Year.

Are there ways in which your congregation or ministry would like to better communicate within your community or with your neighborhood and the world? Would a small grant help get things started? Send your communications or technology-related inquiry by November 30th to Kristen.Schulz@ad-lcms.org.

Our hope is that congregations and ministries will apply for these small funding or pro bono assistance opportunities to better communicate the Gospel of Hope. Please let us know what you need!

Rev. Dr. Robert Hartwell, Chair, TF 6-Communications / Pastor, Village Lutheran Church

If you would like to submit an article or event for publication in E-Communiqué, the District's monthly electronic newsletter, please email it by the end of the third week of the month to Kristen.schulz@ad-lcms.org.

If you would like to submit an article for the next Engage, the Mission Society Newsletter, please email it to Diane.geisler@ad-lcms.org. Good quality photographs and brief captions are welcome. Please make sure you have permission from people in the picture to use them for publication and/or online.

Visit the Atlantic District's Facebook page for more updates.

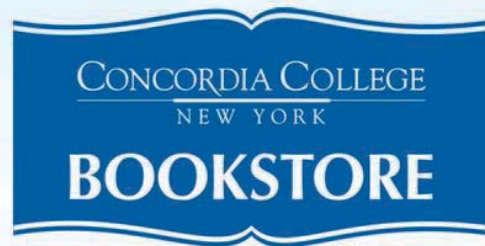
Thank you to all our Sponsors for this Special Issue



Concordia
Publishing House

SAVE \$5

WHEN YOU SPEND **\$15** OR MORE ON CPH PRODUCTS



171 White Plains Road Bronxville, NY 10708
914.337.9300 ccnybookstore.com

offer valid through September 30, 2011

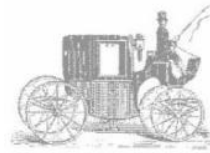
CARRIAGE TRADE INSURANCE AGENCY

SPECIALIZING IN PROVIDING INSURANCE AND BENEFITS TO CHURCHES AND THE NONPROFIT COMMUNITY.

PROPERTY, LIABILITY, AUTO

Call us about Auto and Home Discounts for all employees of Lutheran Churches and Schools through Travelers Insurance.

CARRIAGE TRADE INSURANCE AGENCY



Michael Jakob Annie DeJohn
Jack Glanzer

1 Holland Ave. Suite 105,
Floral Park, New York 11001

Phone: 516.358.5600 Fax: 516.358.5656

www.carriageinsurance.com

providing insurance and benefits to the non-profit community

Professional Home Care Services

What You Need When You Need It

Home Health Aides ■ Personal Care Aides ■ Nursing Housekeepers ■ Live-Ins/Companions ■ Homemakers
■ Physical, Occupational and Respiratory Therapy ■ Medical Social Work ■ Nutritional Counseling



The
LUTHERAN
CARE
NETWORK

We can tailor services to suit your particular needs, and also guide you on insurance coverage.

Castle Staff Services ■ 631-421-2857 ■ www.tlcn.org
94 West Main St. ■ Suite 202 ■ Bay Shore, NY 11706

LUTHERAN CHURCH EXTENSION FUND

Supporting Ministry:

With loans and services created with the Church in mind, LCEF assists LCMS ministries to build and expand.

- Church and School Construction Loans
- Lines of credit
- MissionInsite Customized Demographic Data
- Direct-Mail Campaigns
- Stewardship Education for Children
- School Marketing Resources

Supporting You:

LCEF's financial strength and competitive interest-rate investments provide opportunities to make a difference for investors personally and in sharing the Gospel.

- StewardAccount®
- Family Emergency StewardAccount®
- Short-Term and Long-Term Investments



For information, contact an
LCEF Information Representative
at 1-800-843-5233 or
visit us at www.lcef.org.

LCEF is a nonprofit religious organization; therefore, LCEF investments are not FDIC-insured bank deposit accounts. This is not an offer to sell investments, nor a solicitation to buy. The offer is made solely by LCEF's Offering Circular. Investors should carefully read the Offering Circular, which more fully describes associated risks.

Concordia College-New York proudly announces:



Featuring LCMS President
Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison
along with a distinguished
faculty of prominent voices
in our Church as they discuss
provocative topics in an
academic setting

ONE-DAY SEMINARY

Saturday, November 5

8:30AM – 5:30PM

\$25 Conference fee (includes lunch)
Free for college-age and younger students

TOWN HALL MEETING

Friday, November 4

7:30pm

Free and open to all interested people

register online at
www.concordiaevent.org/ods

For more information please contact

Rev. Greg Dwyer
Director of Church Relations
914.337.9300, x2198
gregory.dwyer@concordia-ny.edu

CONCORDIA COLLEGE 
New York Since 1881



**Center for Wealth
Preservation**

Christopher J. Jones
CFP®, CLU, ChFC
Managing Director
Tel: (516) 682-3379
cjjones@finsvcs.com

Jeff T. Velastegui
*Assistant Managing
Director*
Tel: (516) 682-3383
jvelastegui@finsvcs.com

6800 Jericho Turnpike
Suite 202 West
Syosset, NY 11791
Fax: (516) 364-4263
www.cwpmetro.com

*For 20 years, our highest priority has been helping Lutherans
and their families make comprehensive financial decisions.*

Our broad range of services include:

Insurance & Investment Products

Life Insurance
Disability Income Insurance
Long Term Care
Annuities
Mutual Funds

Financial Planning

Estate Planning
Retirement Planning
Business Planning
Special Needs Planning
Charitable Planning

Please consider us a resource accessible to you in preparing for your future.

Our goal is to improve your quality of life through financial peace of mind.

Christopher J. Jones and Jeff T. Velastegui are registered representatives of and offer securities, investment advisory and financial planning services through MML Investors Services, Inc., member SIPC. Supervisory office: 6800 Jericho Turnpike Suite 202W Syosset NY 11791 Tel: (516) 364-4203 Fax: (516) 364-4263. CRN201203-131800

It's been a long time

September 11, 2001 Ten years

Except whenever a plane flies in low on
the horizon, any horizon
Except whenever the lower Manhattan skyline
comes into view from any angle
Except whenever the sun dapples on skyscraper
windows as on some September morn
Except whenever bagpipes play
Except whenever sirens sound
Except when certain corners are turned and a
route once taken rushes back from memory
Except when someone wanders off from a group
head down while others are celebrating
Except whenever someone asks,
"Where were you?"
Except whenever someone sings "My Lord,
What a Morning" or "Jesus Loves Me"
Except whenever floodlights beam upward
into the black night
Except when friends from then meet and share
a glance, a shrug, a shake of the head

walk
WITH ME

Then ... It all returns ... Instantaneously
Now here ... With nowhere to go
But through and through and through
To the boundary-stitch where
Bone and marrow
Soul and spirit meet
Like the piercing fiery bullet it always is
Imploding smoke-horror smash-searing
open ... The heart of hearts of all of us

And we re-member all of it ... At once

Then, Dear Lord,
Just as on that day, "We flee for refuge
To Thine infinite mercy
Seeking and imploring Thy grace".....

And in the Body and Blood of Christ
received
These days
Just as in those days
Remembrance of Sacrifice
Presence of Love in the absence of life
We ingest the only Restorer
Of Hope
In us
For us
With us
Whom death cannot destroy

Thanks be to God