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**Bishop Stephen Bouman**  
**LDRNY Vice President**  
**Bishop, New York Metropolitan Synod**

It is very much with us, even if it is not in our faces. Our world is far different from the innocence of that beautiful September day in 2001 at nine in the morning. Men in uniforms with guns watch our cars plunge into the tunnels beneath the river. Citigroup building is mentioned in a Homeland Security warning and people line up with identification to get into the building, there are no cars on the street, and the programs of St. Peter's continue to feed the hungry, gather the elderly and call out to God in prayer with a renewed urgency. Many who lost employment, businesses, careers in the arts, are still looking for work in a stagnant economy or have given up. Who would have dreamed, on that beautiful September morning before nine that three years later we would be fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, living with the threat of terror every day of our lives, living in a country isolated from much of the world's solidarity, seeing brave young lives sacrificed in a courageous attempt to help a nation revive after years of dictatorship, yet also embarrassed by images of the torture and humiliation of human beings in the same country?

It is very much with us this September 11 three years later. Almost every time I preach someone waits in the narthex to tell me of a loved one lost, a memory of that day, of a relationship shattered. Several months ago a volunteer fireman on Long Island who was part of the recovery effort at Ground Zero gave me small piece of concrete had had brought home from Ground Zero and asked me to continue to lift what happened to us up in prayer and remembrance. I keep that piece of our sorrow in the pocket of my alb.

From time to time at the liturgy or greeting in the narthex I touch its concrete presence.

The changed world is very much with us. This summer after leading evening worship at Camp Ma He Tu, an outdoor ministry of our synod for young girls and women, a serious faced girl came up to me and asked me if I would pray for something. She is from Transfiguration in the Bronx. Who would you like me to pray for? I asked. She teared up. Will you please pray for my brother, Jose? He has just been sent to Iraq. The camp director, her counselor, and her friends surrounded her in a circle of safety and grace and I prayed for Jose. I have a picture of her on my desk. A piece of concrete. A picture. It is still with us, the tragedy three years ago and the world it changed. It is still with us.

And so is God. "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your

presence?...if I make my bed at Ground Zero (Sheol) you are there...if I say, "surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even darkness is not dark to you, the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you." (Psalm 139, selected verses).

Lutheran Disaster Response continues to weave this ubiquitous presence of God into the fabric of our changed world. New Ground camps continue to help our young people to name their grief and fears and claim their Good Shepherd in summer programs throughout our synod.

Visitors from around the nation and the world continue to visit Ground Zero as a spiritual experience through a faith walk accompanied by Koinonia New York and LDRNY. I am personally grateful for this ministry. I hosted the board of directors of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services for a meeting in New York. I have been able to tell some of the story of 9-11 and the response of the faith community in places as diverse as Norway and Moorehead, Minnesota, but at Ground Zero I am speechless. It was healing for me to walk the via dolorosa of Ground Zero with the LIRS board as a recipient of ministry, as someone else told the story and made the faith connections.

Lutheran Social Services, Lutheran Counselling Center, Lutheran Schools Association, our Metropolitan New York Synod and the Atlantic District and other partners continue to be strengthened in partnership with LDRNY to help economic victims, counsel children, walk with the families of the victims, fashion neighborhood ministry.

It is still with us three years later. A changed world, scarred memories, physical and emotional loss, occasional spiritual entropy. But God is here. The church is strong. The Great Commission calls us toward this changed world. At the eucharist we come together for comfort and renewal, and then the eucharist leads us toward the real presence of Jesus in the world. The ultimate Ground Zero of human history, cross and resurrection, stands at the center of the continued witness of Lutheran Disaster Response New York.

A piece of concrete, a picture on the desk, a conversation in the narthex, a prayer in the woods, a walk at Ground Zero.....it is still with us. As is Immanuel.

In Christ,

Bishop Stephen Paul Bouman