

Faithwalks: The Christian Journey at Ground Zero
By Mikki Baloy, LDRNY Coordinator

Dear Pastor Ann,

Thanks you for so graciously hosting our group's visit to Ground Zero. Your stories of comfort and hope helped all of us address the events of 9/11 from the Christian faith perspective. Each one of us left Lower Manhattan feeling as though the "Faith Walk" had taken us on a journey through hallowed ground.

This passage was written by the pastor of a church in New Jersey, inspired by her recent FaithWalk. A program of Koinonia NYC, FaithWalks engage people with stories of hope and recovery in Lower Manhattan. Pastor Ann Tiemeyer, the director of Koinonia NYC, has created a means of connecting people from all over the world with a sense of the peace and power of Ground Zero ministry.

The typical FaithWalk begins at the Comfort and Renew Center, home of LDRNY and Koinonia's New York City office. The Center, twenty stories above Ground Zero, is often a guest's first sobering glimpse of the devastation below. While at the Center, Pastor Ann invites participants to share their memories of September 11. "We see our mission as sharing stories, and collecting them," she said. The events and their aftermath have affected many people in a variety of ways. One group of students from across the Hudson in Jersey City remembered that their teacher could not tell them what was happening as the tragedy unfolded. A boy realized that he could see the Manhattan skyline from the restroom, and soon students were crowded by that window as they watched the Towers fall. "It's so important when kids share their stories and ask questions. It gives adults, like pastors and teachers, a way of moving that discussion forward into recovery," said Tiemeyer. Another adult is always present for the duration of the FaithWalk, whether it's a parent, congregational leader, or teacher, to witness this experience and guide young people during the FaithWalk journey and after the return home.

The FaithWalk experience then moves outdoors, for a tour of locations significant to the ministry. At places like St. Paul's Chapel, the respite center for volunteers during the rescue and recovery effort, visitors are encouraged to reflect on what it means for a community to heal. The tour continues through other sites in the vicinity, each with a story and opportunity for discussion.

"It's amazing to me to see how even those people at a distance have connections to 9/11," Tiemeyer added. One day, she was standing near the memorial placards with a group of visitors from Texas. The placards list the names of the 2749 known victims, but Tiemeyer is always sure to remind people that there could be many more. "The homeless and the undocumented people who were here probably didn't have anyone to claim them. We don't know their names," she said. "One man in that FaithWalk group started talking about friends of his from Mexico. Their son decided to cross the border into the US and got a job in the financial district. After 9/11, they never heard from him again. They're

still not sure if he died in the Trade Center. It reminds me of how connected we all are to what happened here, even if we're far away."

FaithWalk groups of all ages come from all over the country. Recent visitors have traveled to New York from California and Minnesota, adding the FaithWalk to their experience of the city. "It was the highlight of our trip," said a pastor from Duluth. "Thank you for your spirit and energy and the care you gave our group," said another. A group of international students toured the area with Tiemeyer before moving on to an LCMS youth event. Many local confirmation classes make a pilgrimage to Ground Zero, and leave with a sense of hopeful purpose. Pastor Tiemeyer always encourages participants to volunteer and be a part of their communities at home. Volunteerism, according to Tiemeyer, is a perfect way to contribute to preparedness. "Service is a great way to honor those who died, and communities have a better chance of recovering from disaster if that volunteer connectedness is already in place."

With our view of life forever changed by the events of September 11, Koinonia NYC offers a vision of hope and recovery at the very site where the events unfolded. Travelers from near and far are invited to be a part of this faith-filled experience, and to take their stories home with them. FaithWalks prepare visitors to witness Christian community in Lower Manhattan, and in their own communities. LDRNY was pleased to collaborate with Koinonia to make this opportunity available to everyone.

For more information, contact Pastor Ann Tiemeyer at 212-669-6131, or [click here](#). If you'll be in New York City and want to participate, groups of 5 or more are welcome, with a suggested donation. FaithWalks usually last about three hours and must be prescheduled.