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The south tower of the World Trade Center bursts into flames after being struck by United Air

The south tower of the World Trade Center bursts into flames after being struck by United Airlines Flight 175 in New York in this Sept. 11, 2001, file photo. (OSV News/Reuters/Sean Adair)



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As bishop president and executive director of Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement, we are committed to promoting nonviolence and protecting human dignity in our families, neighborhoods, parishes, nation and world. We are carrying on the work and mission shaped over decades by bishops, religious women and lay leaders — work that was sorely tested by the tragic events nearly 25 years

ago on Sept. 11, 2001.

Our movement responded at that time with a [message](#) which continues to resonate:

As people of faith and disciples of the nonviolent Jesus, we must be willing, even now in this darkest moment, to commit ourselves and urge our sisters and brothers, to resist the impulse to vengeance. ... We must find the courage to break the spiral of violence that so many in our nation, we fear, will be quick to embrace.

A generation has passed since that terrible day in 2001, and U.S. citizens and residents of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent along with practitioners of Islam still bear the weight of distrust and humiliation unjustly inflicted upon them. Iraq and Afghanistan are still struggling decades after attacks by the U.S. Our country is now governed by those who have entrenched an ideology which demonizes and dehumanizes Haitians, people whose first language is Spanish, individuals from countries in the global south, transgender people and nearly anyone who has been marginalized.

This corrosive fear of the other, tightly woven into the policy priorities of the current administration, has caused tremendous pain and suffering in the past 18 months: Our neighbors and families endure the chilling intimidation and accelerated crackdowns of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which is often supported by local police forces. The deployment of the National Guard to certain cities (currently Washington, D.C.; Memphis; and New Orleans) is seen as a trial run for possible more permanent military presence in the coming months or years. Civil liberties are eroding, freedom of the press is threatened and right-wing militias use excessive force and violence to foment terror.

After 25 years, our grief has not been eased or vindicated by years of war, or the unbounded, blasphemous increase in military spending. After 25 years, we still have an overabundance of weapons of war, including nuclear weapons which are an existential threat to God's creation. We watch in horror as shipping boats are attacked off the coast of Venezuela; the populations of Gaza and Sudan face genocide; and Yemen, Lebanon, Iran and too many other locations endure ongoing violence.

After 25 years, we mourn the opportunities for reconciliation and peace that have been lost; the individuals and families who have been harmed; the communities that have been divided; and the civil liberties and human rights which have been compromised.

But we continue to choose to move forward in faith. In the face of violence and despair, our belief in the message of the Resurrection compels us to act with justice and compassion. As Catholic people whose faith by its name is universal, we must unceasingly uphold the dignity and value of all human beings.

In the time after 2001, we have been blessed with the papacies of Francis and Leo XIV. While earlier popes spoke out against war and violent conflict, Francis and Leo have clearly expressed support for creative nonviolence and for nuclear weapons abolition. Thanks to efforts such as Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, now 10 years old, deeper discussions are taking place about a paradigm shift toward nonviolence in our church and the world.

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On this 25th anniversary of the terror attacks of Sept. 11, we vigorously proclaim that all humanity is made in the image and likeness of God. We insist that ICE agents end their vicious attacks on immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Marginalized communities must be protected. Our national dependence on guns must subside. We must refuse to become the oppressor.

In our churches we must insist that our priests and pastors deliver powerful homilies that reinforce Leo's messages of unarmed and disarming peace and the value of human life at all stages.

Our mission remains unchanged since 2001: As people of faith and disciples of the nonviolent Jesus, we are called to commit ourselves and urge our sisters and brothers to resist the impulse to vilify human beings. Rather, in solidarity, we relentlessly call for the end of violent rhetoric and the restoration of civil discourse. We continue to speak out and advocate for federal spending that prioritizes human dignity through funding housing, food, healthcare, education and protection for our Earth's resources, rather than for weapons of mass destruction.

It has been 25 years since the U.S. experienced that terrible day of terror and grief. As we wrote in 2011:

This anniversary offers us an opportunity to reflect the values of the God to whom we have given our allegiance. Let us remember those who were lost and memorialize this day by committing our lives to "the things that make for peace" — drawing closer to those who suffer, cultivating understanding in the midst of suspicion, finding truth in the arguments of those with whom we disagree, embracing some measure of personal sacrifice today to make a better world for our children and grandchildren tomorrow.

God forgive us for what we have done, for what we have failed to do, and give us the courage and strength to move forward with love.

This story appears in the **Sept. 11: 25 years later** feature series. [View the full series.](#)