



A firefighter walks amongst the rubble and the smoldering wreckage of the World Trade Center Oct. 11, 2001, in New York. (AP/Gary Friedman, pool)



by John Dear

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In a special episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast" this week, I commemorate 9/11 by sharing my own experience as the Red Cross coordinator of chaplains after Sept. 11, 2001.

I was scheduled to have breakfast with my parents that morning in the restaurant on the top of the World Trade Center, but they changed their plans at the last minute. I went down to help, and was asked very quickly by the Red Cross to become the local coordinator of the 550 chaplains at the Family Assistance Center. Over the next three months, we served some 50,000 direct relatives of those who died in the Twin Towers. I also worked once or twice a week at Ground Zero, praying with and counseling rescue workers.

I talk about the many people I met, such as Neil, a Long Island Catholic, who came to Ground Zero clutching a bag of hairs snatched from his missing brother-in-law's comb as DNA evidence. While he was filling out the paperwork, he was told his relative's body was found. I prayed with him before he called his sister to tell her.

I also share stories of the many rescue workers I met at Ground Zero, such as the fireman who came scrambling down the smoking seven-story pile, ran up to me and said, "Father, quick, give me your blessing. I'm digging for my best friend." Or the one who ran up to me and begged, "Father, please, teach me how to pray. We found the body of my friend yesterday, and I don't know what to do."

I conclude with reflections about my work organizing protests against the Afghanistan War, and where we are 25 years later.

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