

September 2006

# Virtue In Action

Perspectives on the Terrorist Attacks of Sep. 11

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

REMEMBER THE SUFFERING.

HONOR THE HEROISM.

HOW DOES 9/11 SPEAK TO US TODAY?



**On the five year anniversary** of the terrorist attacks of Sep. 11, 2001 we are called to remember the suffering and harm inflicted upon so many innocent people, to honor the heroism of those who gave their lives for others, and to ask how the events of Sep. 11 speak to our lives today. Can the events of Sep. 11<sup>th</sup> help us to gain a better perspective on our lives? Can they help us define the reality of the world we live in, and affirm what is truly important in our lives?

As a nation and individually, it is important for us to remember the victims and the continued suffering of the families who have lost loved ones. The attacks of Sep. 11 killed more than 2,900 people: 403 fireman and policemen, over 2,100 civilian workers in their offices, 125 soldiers at the Pentagon and 256 airline passengers.

### **A Nation Responds**

Fortunately, private groups and the government have organized many endeavors to assist these families. Scholarships have been funded by private groups, often neighbors and coworkers, to help pay the college tuition of children who lost a parent. Non-profit groups have provided counseling and support to the families. Foundations have been established to address the ongoing needs of children still trying to cope. The government and various companies have provided the families with financial assistance.

On an individual level, thousands of neighbors and friends of families who lost loved ones have helped with the many simple yet important duties of life, such as helping with yard work and driving children to their activities. These endeavors reflect the collective goodness of our nation in being **generous** with our resources, time and talents to assist others in need. They also reflect a strong sense of **solidarity**, in the desire of millions of people to express their unity with those who suffered horrible losses.

### **Goodness Arises from Destruction**

We are also called to remember the values of those who died, and to find inspiration from those who decided to confront the tragedy by affirming values and working to help others.

One example is Ari Schonbrun. Ari helped a co-worker, Virginia DiChiara walk down 78 flights of stairs after she was severely injured with 3rd degree burns from the fire of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center. At work, Ari and Virginia had intense professional disagreements and had little in common. However, from the moment he saw Virginia in desperate need he made



a pledge to her that he would not leave her, and that he would help her reach safety. Ari recounts that at that moment of tragedy all differences of professional views, religion, and ethnicity disappeared as they were united in the purpose of saving Virginia's life. For the last 38 floors of their descent the stairwells were backed up with people waiting to escape. Upon seeing Virginia's injuries, everyone in the stairwell moved to the side so that Ari and Virginia could make it down more quickly. Since 9/11 Ari has spoken to many groups and schools of his experiences. He focuses on the importance of seeing the dignity and value of all people, even those we disagree with, the importance of team work, and especially the value of "slowing down and listening to the whispers from God". When asked why he takes the time to tell his story Ari replies that he doesn't want others to forget the attacks of Sep. 11. He believes he

survived so that he could tell this story and in doing so have a beneficial impact on others in helping them to slowdown in life and to find their life's mission and purpose.

### Heroism and Courage in the Face of Evil

On this anniversary we are also called to honor the heroism and courage of the thousands of firemen, policemen, rescue workers and everyday citizens who worked to save the lives of others, and even directly fought the terrorists. Fireman and policemen demonstrated great **courage** in running into the World Trade Center towers to save as many people as possible before the towers collapsed. Commanders later told how many of the men running into the towers knew there was a good chance they wouldn't survive, yet they lived up to their **duty** as rescuers and gave their lives so that others could live.

One commander told of how firemen in the lobby of one of towers created an exit tunnel with their bodies so that office workers coming into the smoke filled lobby could make their way safely out of the building. As the other tower collapsed, the firemen knew their building would likely soon collapse as well; however, they all stayed in position and gave their lives to allow as many people as possible to make it out in the final seconds.

Two recent motion pictures have told the stories of people who had woken up that day as average citizens, but soon became heroes. *United Flight 93* was based on the fourth plane hijacked on September 11<sup>th</sup>. When passengers found out through cell phone calls about the attacks that had **transpired** at the Pentagon and in New York City, they decided they would not allow their plane to become a weapon of destruction. In storming the cockpit and attacking the terrorists, the plane crashed in Pennsylvania, 20 minutes from Washington, D.C., the terrorists' suspected destination.

More recently the movie *World Trade Center* depicts the true story of two port authority officers caught beneath the rubble of the fallen towers. This film not only shows us the heroism of Officers John McLoughlin and William J. Jimeno, but also the **relentless** determination and **perseverance** of their rescuers, one a retired Marine, Sgt. Jason Thomas, who volunteered to help. Thanks to their sense of duty, courage and perseverance, the stories of the rescuers continue to inspire us and remind us of the greatness and potential of the human spirit, even in the face of terror and destruction.



It is important for us to realize the continuing commitment of hundreds of thousands of men and women who serve in our nation's intelligence services, military, police and fire departments. Many of these people and their families have accepted great personal risk and sacrifice to help protect our nation from terrorists.

### The Terrorist Threat

In addition to remembering and honoring lives lost, we should also reflect on the nature of the evil that ended these lives. In discussing the terrorists, we will refer to them as radical Islamic terrorists. The phrase "radical Islamic" reflects the reality that the terrorists use Islamic religious phrases and some beliefs to advocate their cause, but radical in that they have deviated from and do not truly represent the full truth of the Islamic religion.

Most radical Islamic terrorists believe that nations should be ruled by a **theocracy** where their version of Islamic law rules people's lives. The terrorists view as evil some of the core values free societies represent, such as **tolerance** in respecting the dignity and value of others in their right to determine how to live their

own lives. The terrorists believe that individuals and nations not accepting their views are an evil to be fought against, and are thus justified in killing innocent civilians. Some terrorists are also motivated by their opinions that the foreign policy of the US and other nations has harmed their people, and that Muslims throughout the world are oppressed.

**Lessons for Our Own Lives**

Often a major positive or negative event encourages us to re-evaluate the priorities and goals of our own lives. Looking back at a past tragedy, such as the terrorist attacks, has the power to help put things into perspective for us, giving us great opportunities to grow as individuals and as a nation. As we reflect on both the extreme evil that took away thousands of lives, yet also the courage and resolve of so many of our own citizens, we are compelled to ask: what values are important to us, and what can we do to act on these values?

Many commented after the attacks that things that used to seem so important no longer seem that important. Many resolved that going forward they were less willing to waste emotional energy on petty

conflicts. Some commented that money and material possessions suddenly meant relatively little as tragedy struck and we were confronted with the larger issues of good and evil, life and death. When confronted with disaster, we begin to realize that it is relationships with other people and our contributions to our community that really matter.

The five year anniversary of the attacks of Sep. 11 brings up many emotions and perspectives. We will likely experience sadness and a sense of mourning over the death and destruction that thousands of people experienced, and for many families still experience today. However, we should also find inspiration for our own lives as we reflect on the heroism, courage and resolve of those who answered the call to duty five years ago, and still answer the call today. We are also inspired by the determination and resolve of the victims’ families and their many supporters who have shown us how to respond to evil with goodness and charity. Reflecting on all of these ideas can help us to attain a better perspective on life, and help us to realize what values are important and to affirm our commitment to living out lasting values.

**Vocabulary**

**Courage** - The capacity to meet danger without giving way to fear; to have the courage of one’s convictions; to be willing to put one’s opinions into practice.

**Duty** - something that one feels called to do by moral or legal obligation.

**Empathy** - Entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person’s situation.

**Generosity** - a readiness and willingness to give to others.

**Responsibility** - accepting and meeting the demands of our duty in life, being accountable, and pursuing excellence.

**Solidarity** - A shared common interest; active loyalty within a group.

**Tolerance** - Realizing and appreciating that everyone has a right to different beliefs and opinions—as long as those beliefs and opinions do not cause harm to others.

**Perseverance** - commitment to a course of action or a purpose in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.

**Theocracy**: a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler, with the God’s or deity’s laws being interpreted by the governmental authorities.

**Transpire**: to occur, happen, or take place.

**Relentless**: determined not to give up even in the face of great hardship.

**Oppressed**: to keep down by severe and unjust use of force or authority.

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### Lesson Goals

- ▶ Help students to realize the degree of suffering and loss from the terrorist attacks of Sep. 11
- ▶ Help students to see how good can come from evil in the rescuers efforts, the work of families to continue the values of loved ones lost, and the generosity of our national community to help the families
- ▶ Convey a sense of hope in the human spirit to overcome evil in responding with acts of courage, generosity and resolve
- ▶ Foster an appreciation for the contributions, sacrifice and courage of others in working for our safety and freedom
- ▶ Encourage students to evaluate what values are important to them, and to gain a greater sense of perspective on life.
- ▶ Help students to understand and evaluate the ideology of the terrorist threat that faces us.

## Virtue In Action

### Connecting Virtues to Our World

Current Links in Education  
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### Virtues Highlighted

Courage, Duty, Empathy, Generosity,  
Responsibility, Solidarity, Tolerance

### Discussion Question Options

1. Immediately after 9/11, applications to the Peace Corps and other service organizations increased dramatically. What was it about 9/11 that motivated people to serve?

Do you think endeavors such as the Peace Corp in different areas of the world present a way to combat terrorism?  
(Here we hope to catalyze a conversation on the importance of winning over hearts and minds of people who are vulnerable to the appeal of radical and violent beliefs)

2. What changes did people discuss that they wanted to make in their own lives immediately after Sep. 11? Do you think most individuals have followed through on these resolutions?
3. In reflecting on 9/11 what values do you think we should try to affirm in our own lives, both individually and as a nation? Which aspects of the attacks and individuals' response to the attacks inspire these values?

*(It may be useful to list the values on one side of the board and to then list the aspects of 9/11 that inspires that value on the other side. An example may be the value of working for the good of our nation, inspired by the courage of the rescuers and also inspired by the reality that there are forces trying to defeat us.)*

4. During the rescue and recovery efforts, people of many religious faiths and ethnic traditions joined together to work for the

common good. What does this reality tell us about what it means to be an "American"? How would you define the essence of what it means to be an American?

Immediately after 9/11 many commentators predicted that a good arising from the evil was a renewed sense of American unity to work together in combating the threat of terrorism. Was this prediction correct? If not, what factors do you think have worked against greater unity?

5. What motivates the terrorists to attack us and other societies? How do you think this threat is similar or different from previous threats to our security from ideological enemies such as communism and fascism?
6. What other periods in history have challenged Americans' feelings of safety and security? How did the country respond? Have we responded similarly to 9/11?

*(This question could also be the basis of an extended learning activity where students are organized into teams and each team researches and gives a presentation on how we as a nation responded in previous times where our nation's security was threatened.)*

### Journal Writing Options

- 1) In reflecting on 9/11, write about the values you want to affirm in your own life. Also, write about the various aspects of 9/11 that inspire these values?
- 2) Ask students to identify an "everyday hero" in their own life or one that they've read about in a local or regional newspaper. Students should write about what this person did, or continues to do that made their actions heroic.

## VIRTUE IN ACTION

### EXTENDED LEARNING PROJECTS

1. Ask students to review stories of personal courage and heroism from 9/11, and to choose one that they will then present to classmates in small groups.

<http://www.nleomf.com/911heroes/>

Stories of heroism by law enforcement officers on 9/11

<http://www.firehouse.com/terrorist/911/magazine/gz/>

Stories of the FDNY firefighters on 9/11

<http://usinfo.state.gov/albums/911/>

State Department report on stories of heroism and bravery from 9/11

2. Invitation for Ari Schonbrun to speak. He may be contacted via email at [Ari6357@aol.com](mailto:Ari6357@aol.com)
3. Ask students to interview teachers, parents, and / or friends about what their reactions and experiences have been with the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Questions may include where they were when the attacks struck, their initial and long term reactions to the attacks, and whether 9/11 changed their lives in their perspectives, values and actions. Ask students to submit a written summary of their interviews.
4. Invite a local police officer, firefighter or congressman to discuss local efforts that have been made to address terrorism, both in terms of prevention and response to an attack. Have students prepare questions.
5. Organize the class into 4 teams with the responsibility of researching and making a presentation on terrorist attacks and known attempted attacks in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. Each presentation should include a map presentation of the location of the attacks, the number of people killed and injured, background on the terrorists who launched or attempted the attacks and their motivations.

*Students may use the following site as a quick summary of major attacks.*

<http://www.army.mil/terrorism/>  
*U.S. Army Timeline of Terrorism*

5. As your parents or other adults whether they made a personal commitment to a change in their lives following the attacks of Sep. 11? Did they follow-up with these changes, why or why not?
6. Ask students to research the different proposals for the 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero. Have students present these different proposals to the class and make their own proposal about what should be done.

<http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/finalists.html>

Finalists for the 9/11 World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition

7. Divide the class into teams and have them research different events and issues surrounding terrorism. Some suggested topics include the use of preemptive strikes in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hezbollah, our government's use of wiretapping and other surveillance to identify terrorist threats, profiling at airports, Iran, and North Korea.
8. The report published by the bipartisan 9/11 Commission on Terrorism in 2004 provides a complete account of the events surrounding the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and recommendations regarding what can be done to prevent future attacks. One section of the report entitled, "What to do? A Global Strategy" gives the commission's three-pronged approach to fighting terrorism. Divide students into three groups and assign them one of the three sections of the report. Have them report back to the class summarizing the recommendations and observations of the commission. Also, ask them to evaluate the extent to which we are following the advice of the commission.

[http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report\\_Ch12.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Ch12.pdf)

Chapter 12 from the 9/11 Report: "What to Do? A Global Strategy"



### INTERNET RESOURCES

<http://www.911digitalarchive.org/>  
The September 11 Digital Archive

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughtinthecrossfire/after911.html>

PBS: Caught in the Crossfire

<http://www.firehouse.com/terrorist/911/magazine/gz/>

Extraordinary stories of the FDNY firefighters at Ground Zero

<http://usinfo.state.gov/albums/911/>

State Department report on stories of heroism and bravery from 9/11

<http://www.nleomf.com/911heroes/>

Compelling stories of heroism by law enforcement officers on 9/11

<http://www.9-11commission.gov/>  
The 9/11 Commission Report

<http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/shattered/index.html>

Shattered A Photo-essay of 9/11 by photojournalist James Nachtwey

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/memorial/>

A memorial list of those who died on 9/11 compiled by CNN

<http://www.911exhibit.com/>

After September 11: Images From Ground Zero an exhibit by Joel Meyerowitz