

Trinity offers week's worth of remembrance

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To mark the 10th anniversary of 9/11, on Sept. 10, 2011 Poets House, Trinity Church and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council presented a poetry reading at Trinity Church. Seven prominent poets participated, reading their own work and that of others. Downtown Express photo by Terese Loeb Kreuzer

KREUZER | With music, poetry and meditative silence as well as with the Episcopalian liturgy, Trinity Church at the head of Wall Street and its satellite, St. Paul's Chapel at Broadway and Fulton Street, observed the 10th anniversary of the World Trade Center attack.

From Sunday, Sept. 4 to Monday, Sept. 12, days and nights were packed with events.

"What we've tried to do this week at Trinity is get not so much at the facts as at the truth," said the Rev. Canon Anne Mallonee, vicar of Trinity, "the truth of the meaning we make out of what happened 10 years ago, the meaning of what it is to be alive."

Mallonee was introducing a poetry reading at Trinity Church that took place on Sept. 10. Seven prominent poets read their own work and that of others, inspired by and reflecting on the World Trade Center attack. They ended with a poem read jointly, Galway Kinnell's "When the Towers Fell" with its precise, graphic images of what happened, the search for the missing and ending with the imprint left on those who survived.

"Poetry had such an incredibly deep place around 9/11," said Lee Briccetti, executive director of Poets House in Battery Park City, which co-sponsored the poetry reading along with Trinity Wall Street and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. "People were stunned into silence. They needed words to help them understand how they were feeling. Some things are so big that they can't be expressed. [People needed] help trying to express the depth and nuance of their feeling."

A series of musical programs at Trinity and St. Paul's served the same purpose. On Friday, Sept. 9, six professional choirs sang non-stop from noon until well past 10:30 at night, with performances alternating between the two venues and culminating in Trinity with around 300 choristers performing work by Brahms, Bach, Fauré, and others.

On the evening of Sept. 10, St. Paul's stayed open all night for meditation and a vigil. A labyrinth printed on canvas and modeled on one at Chartres Cathedral was spread out in the middle of the sanctuary, which is

surrounded by artifacts from 9/11: notes and photographs and cots such as the rescue workers slept on and teddy bears like the ones they hugged for comfort. Though only a block from Ground Zero, St. Paul's was structurally unscathed by the attack and was used by rescue workers as a place to recuperate.

All night at St. Paul's people walked the paths of the labyrinth, which leads circuitously to a center of awareness and out again like the passage from birth to death. The lights in the crystal chandeliers were dim, the church lit with candles.

On the morning of Sept. 11 at 8:46 a.m. — the time when the first plane struck the first tower — a bell in St. Paul's churchyard was rung. It is called the "Bell of Hope" and was a gift in September 2002 from the Lord Mayor of the City of London. It has been rung on many occasions of stress and crisis — the bombings in London, Madrid, Mumbai and Moscow among them.

At 1:30 p.m., bell ringers in Trinity's steeple began to ring the church's 12 change bells in an intricate peal that lasted for three hours in memory of the victims of 9/11. Trinity is the only church in the United States with a set of 12 change ringing bells, each of which rotates a full 360 degrees with each stroke.

That night, the Bell of Hope was rung again, this time by Dr. James H. Cooper, rector of Trinity Wall Street, Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein, Senior Rabbi of Central Synagogue and Imam Al-Hajj Talib 'Abdur-Rashid' of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood. Then people who were watching and had some grief they wanted to express were invited to ring the bell, and its clang went on for a long time.

To end the day, some went back inside St. Paul's for the Compline service. The church was dark except for candlelight and suffused with incense. Some people sat or lay down on the floor. Under the direction of Julian Wachner, Trinity's Director of Music and the Arts, the Trinity Choir sang "Lux aeterna" by György Sándor Ligeti, who came from a Hungarian Jewish family and whose music was used by Stanley Kubrick in films such as "2001: A Space Odyssey," "The Shining" and "Eyes Wide Shut." The music sounded both ancient and timeless, like a cosmic wind.

And so at St. Paul's, September 11, 2011 came to an end. The candles were snuffed out.

"Our theme this week is 'Remember to love,'" Anne Mallonee had said in introducing the poetry reading at Trinity. "Moving forward, we seek compassion, we seek to choose what is best about being human, to be able to reach out to one another, together to create a better world."

All week long, white ribbons printed with the words "Remember to Love" had been distributed to people who visited St. Paul's. They were invited to write their own messages on the ribbons and to tie them to the fence surrounding the church, to the Bell of Hope or to the front of St. Paul's memorial altar with its photos and mementoes of the 9/11 victims. By the end of the week, St. Paul's fence was white with ribbons. They looked like the wings of a dove.

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