

Remarks at Interfaith Vigil  
Lexington Battle Green, Lexington, MA  
Sept. 13, 2001  
The Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

Just over a year ago, my family moved back here after 14 years in Washington, D.C. During most of those years, my husband worked at the Pentagon. I drove past the building almost every day. Our son was in the day care center there for a year. After Oklahoma City, we were always aware that one day, some kind of terrorist attack could happen. False alarms evacuated my husband's office. Anti-terrorist barricades surrounded my son's school. In the hospital where I served as a chaplain, we held code yellow drills to practice preparing for a major disaster, with a terrorist attack as one possible scenario.

Now it has happened, in greater magnitude than even those who prepared for it ever imagined. Because I know Washington, because I can see in my mind exactly where the plane went down, because I know that we must know someone who died but don't know who yet, because I know my fellow chaplains are doing the work we trained to do, it is this devastation there that is most real for me. I feel horror, rage, and utter helplessness. I imagine that many of us here have this kind of connection, or one even closer, whether to D.C., New York, Pennsylvania, or to those four airplanes. Those in Washington who worked for the Pentagon (as well as many in New York and those four airplanes) were those who served this country. They were military personnel and civil servants, law enforcement agents and emergency personnel. I am not saying that their deaths are more honorable or more tragic than any other. I only wish to acknowledge their work and their service to our country as part of our national grief.

Almost anywhere else in the world, such a series of catastrophic attacks would topple a government. I say this not to be jingoistic and arrogant but because it is true. We have the infrastructure in place to hold together, even if parts of our country are in tatters. We can be grateful to our public servants--federal, state, local and military--who continue to make this true. We gather to bear witness to the loss of so many of them, to those injured and to the families left behind.