



# THE ENCOURAGER



Let us never forget

MINISTERING TO ALL FIRST RESPONDERS

“Let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:25

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Have you ever wished you could go back and as the Bible reads; “Do your first works over again?” Well, I'm blessed to be able to do just that. At age fourteen I wanted to join our local VFD in West Virginia. My father and mother didn't share my excitement so they refused my request. Then one night after a house caught on fire and almost burned down a house my dad, George, owned, he graciously changed his mind. When the fire department arrived there were only a few firefighters responding so my dad and I jumped in and helped where we could. When it was over, my dad had a talk with the fire chief, who also happened to be my high school band director. The next thing I knew, Dad came up to me and said, “You have a meeting Tuesday night at the fire house”.

Thus, started my career as a volunteer firefighter with the West Hamlin Volunteer Fire Department.

I was with West Hamlin VFD from age fourteen to twenty-one when I married and started a family. Later, I began to do things that involved serving or helping others in different ways. But even though I stopped serving the fire department; serving the fire service remained embedded in my heart. Before I married, just like many of you; I ate, slept, and breathed the fire department. The fire department was my life; plain and simple.

I was raised in a Christian home and attended church faithfully for as long as I can remember. In my teens I turned away from doing the right things and shamefully some of those years were while I was in the fire department. I got to the point that I was afraid to go on a call because I was sure that I wasn't going to come home some night. My thought was, I wasn't living my best for God anymore and what if some night I died from burning in a house and faced that same fate in eternity. Finally, I turned back to loving God and trying to live a life pleasing to Him. I was sure some of my friends would laugh me to shame, but that never happened. About ten years later, a friend from the same department (Everett Dean) asked me to help him start an FCFI chapter in the station I'd left. I'd never heard of FCFI so he invited me to a meeting to learn more about this group. There was something about this group that sparked my interest but circumstances kept me from getting too involved. I was active in my church and wanted to do more for the Lord. My wife and I have worn different hats of helping in ministries. Little



**MEET A MEMBER**  
Mark Allen Hess  
Chaplain Wurtland VFD  
Kentucky FCFI Regional Director

did I know after moving to Kentucky that the Lord would take me on a return journey with the fire service as a chaplain at the Wurtland Fire Department in Greenup, Kentucky. It's been twenty-three years since I was last a volunteer firefighter. At that time I was hands-on and very active in burning buildings and fatal accidents on one of the most dangerous road in West Virginia. Now, I'm more involved in serving the men and women who now serve as I did years ago.

I spoke to Everett shortly after Sept. 11, 2001. He told me how God was using him and that FCFI had helped open the doors for him. He said, “You should find the local fire department and join”. I told him I already knew where they were since I had

to drive by the station every day to take my kids to school. Each time I passed the station, I still had the desire to be a part of the fire service. But, I didn't tell Everett that. Instead I said I was done and my work with the fire department was over. A few years later my family and I moved to a different house in the same little town, Wurtland, and a new fire station was about 200 yards from my new house. Joshua, my youngest son (age sixteen) asked me about joining the fire department. All my battle stories obviously triggered his interest. After several pleads, I called the station to see what they had to say. Usually in the middle of the day, on a week day it's impossible to catch someone at the station. Yet, the chief just so happened to be there. Later on, he told me that he didn't know why he even stopped in that day. He just felt like he needed to. I talked to him about Josh and he responded, “Okay, now we have your son taken care of, how about you, Dad?” I had told him of my past with the VFD life then said, “Oh no! I'm too old, too broken down, and way out of shape to be an active, helpful firefighter.” He responded, “You say you go to church and you minister; right?”

“Yes”

“Well, we could use a chaplain.”

I'd never thought about that. That was two years ago. Since then like most young teenagers, Joshua's interest has changed. He and his brother, Brandon, who also joined and is now married, have left the fire department. Josh said, “Maybe God just used me, Dad, to push you back where you're suppose to be.” I'm blessed to be serving as chaplain with the Wurtland VFD. We recently started the Northeast-

**Fellowship of Christian Firefighters**  
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ern KY Chapter of FCF and I'm working as a regional director with Dan with the state of KY.

I thank God for bringing me back full circle to one of my loves in life where I still get to help people. I'm thankful for the love and support of my wife, four young adult children, and the great group of friends at the Wurtland VFD. They've been willing to work with me with anything I have asked out of them.

After I settled in my role as a chaplain in Kentucky and became a member of FCFI, I once again called on my dear friend Everett Dean and thanked him for being an instrument to my calling. He sadly told me he'd been sick and was not active with serving. He seemed disheartened but he was elated that I'm involved. He was excited once again to be a part of such an awesome organization as the Fellowship of Christian Firefighters. I'm very excited as well to be a part of this group and look forward to serving with you.



*We Will Never Forget!*

by Chief Gay Reynolds  
Chaplain and FCFI Missionary



For ten years, *The Encourager* has displayed the FDNY emblem along with the words, "We will never forget." I know I won't and the time I spent on "The Pile" during the immediate aftermath will forever be embedded in my mind and heart. I witnessed innumerable acts of selfless giving as first responders came to the forefront to serve. I along with many others experienced and witnessed heartbreak after heartbreak as remains were uncovered. FCFI members were involved in over 300 services done as remains of firefighters were found. The remains were draped with our Flag and escorted to the mortuary. A very emotional period, but one done with the deepest respect.

September 11, 2001 has been heralded as the worst of times and yet the best of times because our country came together like never before. We were as one—not divided over little matters, but brought together by our "Pearl Harbor." Wherever you looked, there were signs of "God Bless America", "We Will Never Forget", "These Colors Don't Run" And "United We Stand!" America at its best! As the 10th Anniversary approaches, remember that "All gave some, Some gave all."

We asked you, the members, to submit your reflections and pay your respect to those who gave all. May you be blessed, as I was, as you read the following tributes and reflections.

## *9/11 - A Decade Later*

By Ed Godoy NY Firefighter



Picture courtesy of William Garvey

As we approach the 10th Anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, I find myself asking "Do I feel any different now, ten years later, than I did when I saw these events unfold right before my eyes?" The answer is a resounding NO! For many of us firefighters, our motto is "We fight what you fear", but do we? I'm not sure about most of you, but every August, I fear the upcoming 11th of September. I find myself asking God to give me the strength to get through another emotional time in my life when I know I will replay the events of that fateful day. I am sure that I'm not alone. For many, this time of the year replays the tragedy over and over in our mind. We know exactly where we were when we first heard or saw what was happening. Thoughts of loved ones, relatives, and friends who were lost are vivid and come rushing back. Images of my friends go through my mind like a slide show of my favorite pictures. Then the reality sets in again, that they are just memories that are stored in my mind and in my heart. For the last decade, children have grown up without mothers, fathers, grandmother's, grandfathers, uncle's, aunt's, brother's or sister's. The same can be said about

other family unit members. Wives missing husbands, husbands missing wives, mothers and father are missing children. That day, the link in the chain was broken. For us, the first responders,

who lost so many of our brothers and friends, we can Never Forget. They are forever etched in our memories.

Losing a loved one is never easy, just ask God. Our faith was tested that day and we never gave up. God helped us to stay strong and helped us along the way to get over many troubles and obstacles that we faced. In the last ten years new buildings have replaced those that were destroyed. A permanent memorial and museum has been built in the foot prints of the World Trade Center. Finally, family and friends will have a place to pay their respects and feel closer to their loved ones. Thousands, if not millions of people will now be able to walk upon hallowed ground and pay their respects to those who were lost that day. We must remember that although more than 2,700 people died that day that many of our first responders, construction workers, and others, who volunteered to work and recover those innocent victims from the rubble are suffering from the effects of the toxic dust that emanated for days at the site. Many are ill and suffering from various cancers and many have died since 2001, thus adding to the list of those who are victims. We need to keep all those who worked on the pile in our thoughts and prayers. We need to Never Forget the sacrifices they made working long hours so that families could have some sort of closure. I pray that God will ease their pain and suffering for just like those who were lost, they too are heroes.

A Decade later and it doesn't get any easier.....

## 9/11 Ten Years Later

Rev. Joe Smaha, Chaplain, Firefighter/EMT/Fire Inspector, Hazmat Specialist - Paramus FD  
Fire Instructor – Bergen County Fire Academy /Pastor of the Community Church of Paramus

September 11, 2001, was a beautiful late summer day. The morning sky gave no warning of the impending attacks that were to come. I'd worked late the night before with the Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Company, so I hadn't turned on a radio or TV. I had no clue what was unfolding less than twenty miles from where I live. I just got off the phone with a member of my church when it rang again. It was a fellow firefighter from my department telling me that two planes crashed into both of the twin towers at the World Trade Center. I didn't know at that time that I'd find myself at Ground Zero in New York City with our fire department's Hazardous Material Team in less than 4 hours.



While extremely difficult, it is beneficial for us to remember September 11<sup>th</sup> and the events of that day. I believe we should always remember those who lost their lives on that day in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania. The emergency responders who gave their lives attempting to rescue others and the civilians that were murdered must never be forgotten. But it is just as important for us that we remember what happened to us as Americans on that tragic day. Like Pearl

Like Pearl Harbor, 9/11 reminds us that as a Nation we may be vulnerable, but God helps us to be strong and resilient.

As I reflect on 9/11, ten years later, it causes me ask myself, "Are we any wiser now then we were on September 10, 2001". As firefighters we critique major incidents in order to learn important lessons from them, so we may perform better if faced with a similar incident in the future, and to be better prepared. So, I ask,

"What lessons have we learned from that day? Are we better prepared? Are we any wiser?"

As emergency responders we have learned several vital lessons. First, we found that we had major problems with our radio communication systems that needed to be addressed. Many of these problems have been taken care of, several are still being worked on. Second, we learned that we had to be better prepared for these types of terrorist attacks. When I took Fire Fighter 1, many years ago, there was little or no training on Terrorism Awareness. Since 9/11 we have added extensive training on Emergency Response to Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction to Firefighter 1 training programs in fire academies around the country. Police and EMS are also now much better prepared to deal with these sorts of incidents. So, in the emergency services field we have made some good progress.

As a Nation, one only needs to pass though security at any airport to see that we have learned that our safety depends, in part, upon our security systems. So, here, at least, we have learned something important.

On the Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16 following the attacks, Houses of Worship throughout our Country recorded record breaking attendance. One could see signs everywhere pleading to "Pray for America!" and "God Bless the USA!" It seems that we learned as a Nation that in dire times of trouble we can flee to God, our Creator, for refuge. Psalm 14:6, and Psalm 46:1-11; instruct us in this very thing. During the weeks that followed the signs slowly disappeared and church attendance dropped off to levels at or below those before September 11, 2001. It appears that we still need to learn how to stay close to Him and not wander off. I guess this is why the Scripture accurately says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..." Isaiah 53:6. As a Nation we still have some work to do.



Picture courtesy of William Garvey

Psalm 86:11 tells us, "Teach me your ways, O Lord that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you." For me the most important question is posed to us as Christians. What has the Lord taught us since September 11, 2001? Most of us have learned how fragile, brief, and uncertain life can be. And this is good, for the writer of Psalm 90 :12 prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom". Wisdom is a wonderful thing for us to gain. But we need to be wise in many areas. In Proverbs 11:30 we are told that, "He who wins souls is wise." So, I also hope and pray that all of us have learned that because life is so uncertain and that tragedy can strike at any time, even on the most beautiful of days, that we have a sacred responsibility to those who are lost. One of my favorite Bible verses for Christians in the fire service is found in Jude 23 that implores us, "Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment." Just as no self-respecting firefighter, worth his/her weight in salt, would willingly let a viable, savable victim perish in a burning building, we, as Christian firefighters, must have the same passion for the souls of the lost. We must be eternal firefighters for the Lord.

If we remember September 11, 2001 never forgetting those who perished or what happened to America on that day and if we have learned some vital lessons that have transformed our lives and the way that we do things. If we indeed are any wiser. If we have become better emergency responders, an improved Nation, and Christians that are more sensitive to the things of the Lord and the needs of the lost; then we are living proof of what Paul proclaims to us in his letter to the Church in Rome, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28; NIV). Praise God for His goodness, strength, and blessings in our lives.

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