

# Accepting Differences and Sharing Goals: Buffalo's Religious Network



Courtesy of the Network of Religious Communities

Members of Buffalo's Network of Religious Communities show their solidarity at a 9/11 interfaith memorial service.

In 1991, the newspaper *USA Today* declared Buffalo, New York, the “City with a Heart.” Buffalo has a population of more than 250,000 and a history as an inland port, which has resulted in its becoming home to many religious and ethnic groups.

In 1999, the Buffalo Area Metropolitan Ministries, founded in 1975, and the Buffalo Area Council of Churches, founded in 1857, combined to create the Network of Religious Communities. “The Network” includes members of Baha’i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist, and Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Christian faiths, and has developed a number of programs to promote communication and cooperation within and between faith communities and the wider Buffalo community. Their tradition of working together helped in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Immediately after the attacks, the community gathered to issue a statement of unity and concern, asking all citizens to respond in ways that would be positive. They planned and conducted an interfaith prayer service that filled one of the largest churches in the area. The November 2001 annual meeting included a discussion featuring Muslim, Jewish, and Protestant speakers. That same month they began a six-month educational series on “The World of Islam” to help other groups learn about various aspects of Islam.

To mark the first anniversary of September 11, representatives from the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Unitarian, Baha’i, Native American, and Christian religions gathered to express peace, unity, and hope.

The Network has four regular television programs, a weekly radio program, and three newsletters that regularly reach 2,500 individuals from more than 1,200 congregations and religious organizations in the Buffalo area. The faith groups also work together on shared concerns such as feeding the hungry. Their food pantry program helped feed 15,000 people last year.

Through the Network’s programs, people are building coalitions and bridges of understanding between individuals and faith groups, and across the broader community, enriching the congregations themselves and building cooperation that makes their city stronger. ■

---

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Remembering the Victims



Rendering by Squared Design Lab, Courtesy of the LMDC

A projected view from the plaza of Reflecting Absence, the selected design for the New York City World Trade Center memorial that will pay tribute to those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center; in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon, and those who perished in the World Trade Center attack on February 26, 1993.

On September 11, 2009, the eighth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, a memorial that not only will honor those who died, but also will be a place where future generations can learn about the historical impact of that day, is scheduled to open on the site of the World Trade Center.

“This memorial is not for us. ... It is for our children and grandchildren. It is so those who visit that sacred ground know what happened there and why so many people died to protect our freedoms,” New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said at the unveiling of a design for a memorial called Reflecting Absence in January 2004.



A formal memorial is planned to take the place of this spontaneous memorial at the Flight 93 crash site in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Reflecting Absence will be a 16-acre site to honor those who died in the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, and on Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, as well as those who died in the February 26, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center. In addition to this memorial, on-site memorials are planned for the Pentagon and the Flight 93 crash site.

Architects Michael Arad of New York and Peter Walker from Berkeley, California, designed the memorial, which also honors survivors and those who assisted in the rescue and recovery process.

Arad and Walker’s design proposal called for “a space that resonates with