

## Historic Chapel Embraces Role as Monument to Sept. 11

### A Sanctuary for Ground Zero Workers Mounts a More Permanent Exhibition



Ozler Muhammad / The New York Times



David Dunlap

Left, Frank Migliorelli, of ESI Design and the Rev. Dr. Daniel P. Matthews, departing rector of Trinity Parish, looking over the chapel's exhibition about its ministry to ground zero workers. The display, designed by ESI Design, will open on Monday. Above, St. Paul's Chapel in 1988.

By **DAVID W. DUNLAP**

St. Paul's Chapel, where Americans worshiped even before they were American, has long been known as the oldest public building in Manhattan.

Old, it certainly was. But the Episcopal chapel did not really become public until Sept. 11, 2002, when the doors opened to "Out of the Dust," a temporary display about its ground zero ministry. The show was supposed to run only three months.

Instead, it drew crowds. Thousands. Tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands. One million, as of early March. St. Paul's has become the most substantive 9/11 monument around the World Trade Center site. It is a place where visitors can experience firsthand something of the grief and generosity that met the attack on New York.

Now this public role has been institutionalized. On Sunday, the Rev. Dr. Daniel P. Matthews, the departing rector of Trinity Parish, will turn over to his successor, the Rev. Dr.

James H. Cooper, a St. Paul's Chapel with a new exhibition, "Unwavering Spirit: Hope and Healing at Ground Zero," woven into the sacred space.

Illustrated panels around the churchyard and on the front porch will serve as keys to the history of St. Paul's, a 238-year-old Trinity chapel. Inside, eight-foot-high movable display stations — deliberately ephemeral in their pipe-frame construction — will tell the story of the chapel and its ministry with images, artifacts and computers.

"I don't think this sacred space is diminished in any way, but rather enhanced by its use," Dr. Matthews said yesterday after his first tour of the exhibition, still a work in progress. "And that use is to respond to the deep, soulful cries for meaning."

"A sacred space is used by the church to answer the spiritual hunger of people," from the American Revolution to the civil rights movement, he said. "This chapel is in the same tradition, holding up comfort and solace in the shadow of one of the greatest tragedies in the history of America."

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Under the chapel's vaulted baby-blue ceiling, haggard workers from the mountainous wreckage across Church Street found hot food, dry socks and soft music; podiatrists (in George Washington's pew), chiropractors and massage therapists; cheering banners and letters and children's drawings; a place to sleep, to breathe, to pray.

St. Paul's, on a block bounded by Broadway and Vesey, Fulton and Church Streets, opened in 1766, survived the great fire of 1776 and welcomed the newly inaugurated President Washington to a service on April 30, 1789.

He worshiped there until the national capital moved to Philadelphia the next year.

The ground zero ministry — and then the reaction to the show about the ministry — surprised, overwhelmed and, at times, divided Trinity's leaders, who have struggled since the attack to define what St. Paul's new role ought to be in the city and in the parish.

"St. Paul's was forever changed by 9/11," said Linda Hanick, director of special projects at Trinity, "and we needed to be in a constant attitude of discernment: why are all these people coming?"

Parish leaders acknowledged implicitly that their chapel had become a 9/11 monument. And the reasons went beyond spiritual and emotional.

"We have a roof, we have heat, we have bathrooms and we have tons of seats," Ms. Hanick said.

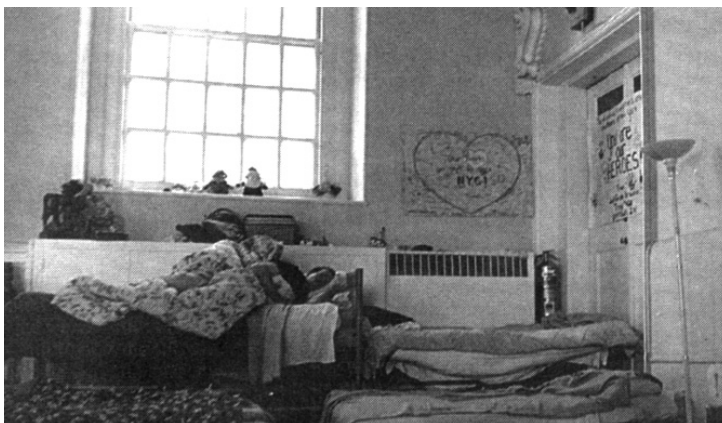
They also realized that St. Paul's was likely to play this part at least until the main memorial opens in 2008 or 2009. It was equally clear that the temporary exhibition, designed by Lynn Brewster, could not last that long.

ESI Design created the new exhibition. "One of our goals," said Edwin Schlossberg, the principal designer at ESI, "was to design something that in a way disappeared, so that you could get through the objects to the experience."

That includes personal stories in audio clips at the display stations, from those who volunteered, those who sent encouraging messages and those who received them. "The reason we wanted to get those voices was to connect a human to the objects," said Frank Migliorelli, director of interactive design at ESI.

The display stations will be arranged around the perimeter aisles of the chapel, with their screens and speakers facing away from the central pews, to diminish possible distraction. They are on casters so they can be moved out of the way entirely.

Beginning next week, the exhibition will be open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sundays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is no charge for admission. The main Sunday service is celebrated at 8 a.m.



Angel Franco / The New York Times

St. Paul's will become more of a community center, Ms. Hanick said. Taz Pirmohamed, the director of business development and marketing at ESI, spoke as a Muslim about the chapel's sense of openness. "The architecture and history are Christian," she said, "but the feeling I get there is that it's very interfaith."

An important step toward integrating the chapel into the neighborhood was taken last November when the Church Street gate was opened for the first time in the memory of parish officials, allowing visitors to approach from the trade center site and through the churchyard.

Even when the nearby memorial is completed, Trinity Parish believes that the chapel will still provide an important — and distinct — narrative. "We have a 9/11 story to offer that has hope in it," said John Allen, Trinity's communications director.

Mrs. Havlish, for one, keeps coming back whenever she is in the city. "I have such a strong memory of the love and caring there that every time I walk in, I feel it again," she said. "That chapel can never go back to its ordinary use."