



Bishop Caggiano (opinion): 25 years after 9/11 - 'Resilience ... unfolds over years'

By Bishop Frank J. Caggiano - September 4, 2026

On a clear day, standing at the point at [Sherwood Island State Park in Westport](#), you can see the Manhattan skyline across Long Island Sound. That is why Connecticut placed its official 9/11 memorial there. On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, people gathered on that shoreline and watched the smoke rise over lower Manhattan. Today the names of 161 people with ties to our state are engraved in stone at that spot, and each September their families return to lay white roses there.

Twenty-five years is long enough for a wound to close into a scar, and long enough for a generation to grow up knowing that morning only as a chapter in a textbook. It is not nearly long enough for the families I serve. In Fairfield County the loss has never been abstract. Our trains carried neighbors into those towers, and that evening they came back with empty seats. Some families never received remains to bury, a particular sorrow that does not resolve.

In the years since, I have sat with some of them: parents who lost children, children who were infants then and are grown now, colleagues who still wonder why they were late to work that day. What they have taught me is worth sharing.

The first lesson is that resilience is not the same thing as moving on. We picture resilience as the drama of those first hours: firefighters climbing stairwells while everyone else descended, the flotilla of ferries and tugboats that carried thousands and thousands of people off the island of Manhattan that day. All of it was real, and worthy of awe. But the resilience that actually rebuilds a life is quieter and unfolds over years. It is getting children to school. It is keeping the anniversary each year. It is telling the stories so that the one who died remains a person and not a statistic. Ordinary faithfulness, repeated over decades, is the most underrated courage we have.

The second lesson concerns fear, which was the intended product of that attack. In the Gospels, the command Jesus repeats more often than any other is simply this: do not be afraid. He does not say that danger is unreal or grief unwarranted. He says that fear must not be allowed to govern us. Fear left to itself narrows our vision, hardens our judgments,

teaches us to see a threat in the neighbor we have not met, and tempts us to surrender things we would never let go of in calmer times. Courage has never meant the absence of fear. It means refusing to give fear the last word.

The third lesson is the hardest, and I offer it carefully. It is mercy. First, what forgiveness is not. It is not forgetting, excusing, or indifference to justice. Justice without mercy becomes vengeance, and mercy without justice becomes indulgence. Forgiveness begins with a full acknowledgment of the wound and then refuses to let that wound dictate the rest of a life. It is not a feeling that arrives one morning but a deliberate decision, sometimes one that must be made again and again over years.

There is a public dimension to this as well. After an atrocity, the temptation is to widen the circle of blame until it takes in the innocent, until suspicion falls on people who share a religion, a language, or a country of origin with the guilty. Some of our own neighbors in Connecticut can probably tell you what that felt like in the autumn of 2001. Allowing this unfair bias to take hold hands the perpetrators of violence a second victory.

We have a particular obligation now to those who do not remember 9/11. A young person born in 2001 is turning 25 this year. If all we pass on is the footage of the towers burning, we will have handed on only a fraction of what happened; missing is the stairwell climbed in the wrong direction, the stranger carried down many flights and saved, the boat that turned toward the smoke instead of away from it, and the long years of neighbors quietly showing up for the families left behind, missing a loved one. Our children need to know that human beings did those things, because one day something may be asked of them.

The memorial at Sherwood Island was set so that visitors face the water as they read. Standing there, you take in the names cut into the stone and, beyond them, the skyline that was rebuilt. Both are true at once: what was done to us, and what we did afterward. Twenty-five years on, the question is not whether we will remember. It is what we choose to carry forward, and how we are better for it.

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