

NEW YORK POST, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2001

Sacred site goes silent for all-day memorial

By BRIDGET HARRISON
and LAURA ITALIANO

The sun will rise in silence over ground zero today for the first time since Sept. 11, as all work pauses in preparation for a massive memorial service.

The thrum of diesel generators and bulldozer engines — a loud and virtually constant sound in the last seven weeks — was to be stilled for 24 hours at the 16-acre site, until tonight at 7, in honor of the terror victims.

This afternoon, thousands of mourning family members will bow their heads and share in that silence at the invitation-only memorial, scheduled for 2 p.m.

Each family will be presented with an urn containing ash from the site — a symbol of the earthly remains denied to so many families by the World Trade Center's destruction. Some 5,000 people lost their lives or are still missing in the tragedy.

Some family members say they expect to draw strength from the sacred site.

Others say they still feel too fragile to attend — a difference of opinion evident even within individual families, like that of Rita Blau, 52, of Bath Beach, Brooklyn.

"I look at her picture and I cry every day for her," her husband, Ira, 49, said yesterday.

Ira said he won't be going to the service today, although his daughters, Michele, 32, and Nicole, 23, will.

"I don't even know if I want the urn," he said. "I'm grieving in my own way."

"I've been to the site already, and I saw two buildings down, and I felt nothing," Ira, a restaurant manager, said of his wife of 20 years, who worked as a receptionist for a financial company on the 70th floor of the south tower.

"But I can look once at

my wife's picture, and I cry all day."

Ira — who was the first family member to claim a death certificate for a missing relative — said he is happy his two "girls" are going.

And they say they understand his decision, but need to be there, at ground zero, themselves.

"It was an easy decision," said Michele, who works for the Bank of New York at 1 Wall Street — close enough to see the tower collapse that claimed her mother's life.

"I've been to the scene also," she said. "And I felt closer to her, just being there — I just can't describe it any better."

"Families have to make their own decision on whether it's helpful to them or not," Mayor Giuliani said of the service. "For some people, it is very comforting being there ... That's why this is very optional."

At dawn, volunteers were to begin erecting 5,000 folding chairs along Church Street between Cortlandt and Vesey streets, in front of a stage specially set up on Dey Street.

"We want people to be facing where the Twin Towers once stood," said Rosemarie O'Keefe, city commissioner of community assistance.

"But no one will be stepping on the ashes or the sacred ground."

Edward Cardinal Egan will lead prayers during the one-hour, speech-free service, which will feature Andrew Lloyd Weber playing piano with the St. Luke's Orchestra.

Other religious leaders, including Rabbi Joseph Potasnick, the Rev. Franklin Graham and NYPD chaplain Imam Izak-El Mu'eed Pasha, will also take part.

Afterward, the families will be invited to make their way to Pier 94, where they'll be presented with an American flag and an urn containing ashes from the World Trade Center site.

CITY_21MC100_011831840