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Feelings of Loss and the Sound of Silence Greet Families at the Site

By SHAILA K. DEWAN

The mountains of ruin at ground zero have been reduced to smoldering dunes, the powdery ash has been rinsed from the streets and the stench has weakened. But at a memorial service yesterday that city officials said drew 9,200 mourners, there was no mistaking the site for anything other than a mass grave.

For many families, the service marked their first visit to the site, their first glimpse of the place from which their loved ones never returned. And no matter how many candles they had lighted at firehouses or how many funerals they had attended, they said, just being at the site with so many others who shared their loss brought a new dimension to their grief.

"It was something that thousands of people were waiting for," said Naomi Roman, 43, whose sister-in-law's sister, Diana J. O'Connor, worked at Sandler O'Neill & Partners. "So many people got together, and it had nothing to do with race or religion. It was a unity."

But Ms. Roman acknowledged that for some, like Ms. O'Connor's husband, who did not attend, six weeks was too soon for the encounter. "He could not handle this," she said.

Patricia Rosch Carrington, 34, did not attend previous services like the one at Yankee Stadium Sept. 23 and had not planned to come to this one. But yesterday morning, doing yard work at her home in East Hampton, N.Y., she suddenly decided the leaves could wait. "There was a pull that said, 'Call and do it,'" she said, adding that the urge felt like a nudge from her late husband, Jeremy Carrington, whose memorial service will be held this week.

Two hours before the 2 p.m. service, four blocks of Church Street began to fill with people, some dressed up, some bundled up against the early winter chill. The lucky ones got a view of the stage, whose backdrop was a plume of smoke and a filigreed sliver of the facade of the south tower. During the national anthem, people held photographs of their loved ones above the crowd, some using the same "missing" fliers that they posted throughout the city and that have become such striking emblems of individual loss.

While stars like Andrew Lloyd Webber, the tenor Andrea Bocelli and the soprano Kathleen Battle were among the performers, the supporting cast was one that has become familiar to anyone who has marched numbly through bereavement in the past few weeks: gentle people in gray Red Cross aprons dispensing coffee and tissues, firefighters in helmets and police officers in blue "community affairs" windbreakers, roaming grief counselors identifiable by pale yellow "mental health" badges, and, of course, the mayor.

But at this service, unlike other ones, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani stayed hunched in his chair on stage. Gov. George E. Pataki and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton kept silent as well. The service was limited to music and remarks by religious leaders, Cardinal Edward Egan, Imam Izak-El Mu'eed Pasha, the Muslim chaplain of the Police Department, Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, the Jewish chaplain of the Fire Department, and the Rev. Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham.

Of them, Imam Pasha was perhaps the most outspoken on the subject of tolerance, asking God to prevent the world's religions from being used for evil. "War is not something

that any human being wants, but in defense of ourselves we must fight," he said. "But, God, let us fight for peace; let us not deviate from establishing peace. Let us have peace to-

day, let us bring peace to these family members, let their hearts be comforted with all the words that will be said today."

Not everyone was happy that the

mayor kept silent, even though the memorial's planners had decided that no politicians would speak. "I don't know why they would include him as a politician. He's the mayor of

the city," said Mike Meehan, as if the distinction between the two were obvious. "He's the man who brought the city together. You were waiting for the climax when the mayor would speak to us, and it didn't happen." Mr. Meehan lost his son, Damian, a commodities trader at Carr Futures.

In addition to standbys like "Amazing Grace," the listeners heard "Raisins and Almonds," a traditional Yiddish song, performed on the violin by Ilya Gringolts, and "Let Us Love in Peace," with Lord Lloyd-Webber on the piano. Two giant video screens showed close-ups of the rubble, little of which was visible from Church Street.

It was only the second time since Sept. 11 that recovery work had stopped at the site, and the first was for only one minute of silence. Those who attended the service appreciated the serenity, but to those who had lived near the roar of generators for six weeks, it was eerie to see the giant cranes frozen and hear nothing.

"There is a still feeling, a feeling of sadness," said Dennis Hayden, 51, a doorman in Battery Park City. "When you hear the cranes and the trucks and the sounds of the recovery effort it's almost normal. There's more hope when you hear the workers there."

"We are in mourning, Lord," Cardinal Egan said. "We have hardly any tears left to shed."

But there were tears, as if from some collective, untapped aquifer. They came in a trickle during the service, but a deluge afterward, as people were given the chance to file up onto the stage to get a view of the ground where the towers once stood. For nearly two hours the aisles were crowded with people, waiting patiently for what amounted to a graveside moment. "My husband needs to go up there," explained Louise Yaskulka, whose mother-in-law died. "He hasn't cried yet."

Encida Lugo, 37, was already in tears, but she said she had not yet accepted the death of her brother, Daniel Lugo, a security officer in the south tower. That is why she was headed toward the devastation, the arm of a young woman, a daughter.

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or a niece, around her waist. "Maybe the reality could sink into my head," she said.

Some people tossed flowers over the railing. Others simply looked. One woman, wearing her husband's photo clipped to her jacket like an identification badge, came off the stage, turned to a fireman and offered him her hand.

To some, fraternity was as important as location.

"When we got there we thought, there's nothing to look at here," said Carolyn Staub. "There's a truck, there's a crane, so what? But once it started it didn't matter. There was the music, the words and the people around us."

Ms. Staub, who lost her brother, Craig, said she and her family did not need to speak to others. "There was a silent understanding," she said.

And the experience, she said, eased the burden for her mother, who had been reluctant to plan a time for the family to say goodbye to her son.

"Now she has an understanding of what a memorial can do for her and now she wants to do that for him," Ms. Staub said. "Before, she was doing it because she was supposed to. But now her heart is in it."

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Photograph bottom right by Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times; other photos by Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

TOKENS OF LOSS During a service at ground zero in Lower Manhattan yesterday, firefighters accepted mementos from victims' families and placed them on the rubble. More than 9,000 mourners attended. Page B9.

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