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Akron pauses to reflect

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The tragedy of Sept. 11 brought local residents to their knees again Monday.

But the number of those praying at St. Bernard Catholic Church five years after the terrorist attacks was less than a third of the 1,000 who poured into the downtown Akron church for the first anniversary in 2002.

"I was kind of disappointed that the turnout wasn't what it should have been. I think people have moved on" said Destry Brooks, who attended both the 2002 and 2006 observances.

"It's all right to move on, but never forget. Don't take anything for granted. I think we owe it to the people who lost their lives, and those who are still suffering, to remember."

Brooks, of Akron, was one of about 300 people who attended a multi-faith service to mark the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks Sept. 11, 2001. The service -- *A Commemoration of Strength, A Celebration of Hope* -- was an opportunity to publicly remember those who died at the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and aboard United Airlines Flight 93 in western Pennsylvania.

It also was a chance to memorialize safety forces who died while trying to save lives that day; to honor U.S. service members who have been deployed in foreign wars; and to pray as a community for peace.

All around Akron on Monday, people remembered 9/11 by sounding sirens, praying, burning candles and walking through a field of flags.

Firetrucks were rolled out of Akron's 13 stations, firefighters assembled outside the buildings, and at 10:05 and 10:28 a.m., the exact moments when the two towers of the World Trade Center collapsed in 2001, sirens were sounded for 30 seconds.

As the sirens wailed, firefighters, police officers and schoolchildren stood in silence. Thirteen sixth-graders from nearby Summit Academy watched the ceremony at Fire Station No. 2 on East Exchange Street.

Vickie Harris, 36, mother of student Jackson Harris, 11, said Sept. 11 made her son more compassionate about others. "He has learned empathy," she said.

She said her son gave money from his piggy bank to the Akron Fire Truck Fund, in which \$1.4 million was raised for fire and police equipment for New York.

It was difficult for Akron Fire Capt. James Case to even talk about the fifth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Case said the reality of what happened that day is hard to think about. "We don't dwell on it," he said.

Case said 343 firefighters went to the World Trade Center and never came back.

But Case said that out of the ruins of that day came hope.

"I think of the 20,000 people who made it out," he said.

Akron Deputy Mayor David Lieberth, attending the ceremony at Fire Station No. 2, said the 9/11 anniversary is a time to think of those who serve the country in uniform around the world.

"To those of us not in uniform, it gives us an opportunity to extend our gratitude," he said. At St. Bernard, the Rev. Robert Denton, Akron Police Department chaplain and executive director of Akron's Victim Assistance Program, talked about the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Denton, who went to New York to assist victims after the collapse of the World Trade Center, said many citizens have gone back to their normal lives.

"This fifth anniversary... should force us back to something I think many people find a little embarrassing -- that for a while, we went back to praying, to our churches or synagogues, to hanging flags. Almost an embarrassing sense that we overreacted with our patriotism and prayers," Denton said. "Perhaps the legacy of the fifth anniversary is our underreaction, with no recognition of what we have lost in the interim."

Houses of worship

Bishop F. Josephus Johnson, founder and pastor of the House of the Lord, cited a study by the Barna Group that showed how houses of worship overflowed with Americans looking to God to help them cope immediately after the attacks. Five years later, the study says, religious activity has gone back to pre-9/11 levels.

"By and large, we have forgotten... the sickness that we felt in the pits of our stomachs is gone," Johnson said. "We should not minimize or trivialize the events of Sept. 11. We must return to a God who can grace us with his sovereign protection. If we want God to bless America, we must bless God."

For Akron firefighter Dan Garrett, 28, who works at Fire Station No. 2, Sept. 11 is a day that he'll never trivialize. Garrett, a 1997 Stow-Munroe Falls High School graduate, was in the Marine Corps in Hawaii five years ago.

After he got out of the Marines, he joined the Ohio Army National Guard's 1-107th Armor Battalion HHC in Stow and served a year in Iraq. He got home in January.

The anniversary, he said, "kind of brings everybody together. It's gonna be an important day for the rest of our lives."

At Goodyear Heights Metro Park, on the final day of the Patriot Day Healing Field Flag Memorial, friends Vera Anthon and Ruby Turnbloom joined more than 30,000 people to tour the American flag display over the weekend.

The two women walked through the flags and talked about the Sept. 11 anniversary.

"I have a grandson (Marine Brian Mohr) in Iraq," Anthon, a retired school secretary, said as she stopped to inspect some of the 2,500 flags.

Turnbloom said she watched all of the events of Sept. 11 on her television. Five years later, she said, "we don't feel safe anymore."

About 40 people with candles gathered in a circle near the federal courthouse in Akron Monday evening to remember those who died on Sept. 11, 2001, and the Iraq war. The Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee sponsored the event.

Wilma DeMarco of Boston Township clutched a sign that read "Peace Now! End the Killing."

DeMarco said she goes to the courthouse in Akron every Friday around 4:30 p.m. to protest the war in Iraq. "I'm concerned about the war," she said.

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