



HOLY CROSS HIGH SCHOOL

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When a significant event happens on a certain day in our lives, it is forever etched into our memories. For me, one of those days occurred on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. I was President of Holy Cross High School, and Mr. Joseph Giannuzzi was Principal.

It was the first day of school for all four classes: freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. It was a beautiful pre-fall day and not a cloud was in the sky! After the morning prayer, pledge, and announcements, it was my practice to sneak down to the cafeteria to get a cup of coffee.

On my way back to my office, someone informed me that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Towers. Remembering that a small plane crashed into the Empire State Building several decades ago, I didn't think too much of it. However, upon returning to my office, I turned on my television, which, to my horror and dismay, showed the crash. It was no small plane. Flames and smoke were bellowing out of the tower. And then, shortly after, the second plane crashed into the second tower. At first, it seemed so unreal – something that you may have seen in a movie.

As time passed, word of the disaster spread throughout the school's offices. Faculty who were not teaching poured into my office to watch the developing scenes. Some had family members or friends who worked in lower Manhattan near the Trade Center.

The big question was how to let the students know what was happening. An announcement was made to the entire school, followed by a short prayer service for those in the towers and the rescue workers. We tried to avoid panic and conducted the day as normally as we could. However, the front doors were locked, and the administration kept close attention to the developments occurring by the minute.

Then, there was news of the towers crumbling. It was an incredible sight. The city was put on lockdown. Buses and subways stopped. Businesses and offices shut down. Billows of smoke and dust were seen in the sky. Cell phone calls were not getting through. What were we to do with nearly a thousand students entrusted to our care?

The office phones were ringing constantly. Parents were calling to inform us that they would be picking up their sons. We ended the school day shortly after 1 PM. Since there was no public transportation running, all students were picked up by family or friends. In a few exceptional cases, students who lived nearby were permitted to walk home with their parents' approval.

The city was "shut down" for two days. The streets were unbelievably quiet. When the magnitude of the event was finally realized, we knew our lives would never be the same again.

While the school mourned all who lost their lives, we especially mourned the loss of our alumni and Father Francis Grogan. For me, Father Grogan's loss was very personal. He was my junior religion teacher, and we soon became good friends. He celebrated Mass for my first profession of vows and was the celebrant at my twenty-fifth jubilee. His warmth and graciousness will never be forgotten.

May his soul, and the souls of all our alumni who lost their lives in this event, rest in peace. And may their families, who still bear the scars of their loss, be consoled as they remember the lives of those whom they lost on that fateful day.

Brother Stephen LaMendola, CSC

September 11, 2026