



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 30, 2011

## NYC Policy: No Clergy at 9/11 10th Anniversary

Evelyn Erskine, a spokeswoman for the Mayor, told [CNN](#) that the ceremony “was designed in coordination with 9-11 families with a mixture of readings that are spiritual, historical, and personal in nature.” She added that “rather than have disagreements over which religious leaders participate, we would like to keep the focus of our commemoration ceremony on the family members of those who died.”



But the absence of appropriate spiritual leadership, particularly in light of the manner in which the nation turned to faith in the days and weeks after the 9/11 attacks, has prompted criticism from a variety of leaders across the nation and a call for the mayor to reverse his policy.

Rudy Washington, an official in former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s administration — and the organizer of the high-profile interfaith service at Yankee Stadium shortly after the attacks — told the *Wall Street Journal* that “to have a memorial service where there’s no prayer ... appears to be insanity to me. I feel like America has lost its way.”

Similarly, New York City Council member Fernando Cabrera, who also pastors [New Life Outreach International](#) church in the Bronx, said he was “utterly disappointed” by the decision to exclude clergy participation, noting that in the aftermath of the attacks, the nation’s spiritual leaders provided important stability and counsel to the American people. “This is one of the pillars that carried us through,” he said. “They were the spiritual and emotional backbone, and when you have a situation where people are trying to find meaning, where something is bigger than them, when you have a crisis of this level, they often look to the clergy.”

John Long, director of the Federation of Fire Chaplains for the Mid-Atlantic, “seemed confused when he heard that religious groups would be excluded from the 10th anniversary 9/11 memorial service,” reported the *Christian Post*. Long told the *Post*: “You can’t have a memorial service without religion. If it wasn’t for God and his direction, you couldn’t have memorial services to begin with.”

Former presidential candidate Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network, expressed his displeasure at the exclusion, telling [NewsMax.com](#): “It goes with the finest traditions of our nation that we memorialize bravery, courage, and sacrifice with appeal to the Author of life.” Robertson said that he was “frankly shocked that Mayor Bloomberg thinks that he is doing the city of New York a favor by eliminating the spiritual element at an event commemorating tragedy, grief, and heroic sacrifice.”

Ken Klukowski, director of the Center for Religious Liberty at the [Family Research Council](#), suggested that, unlike millions of other Americans, Bloomberg had forgotten the response of Americans in the hours and days following the 9/11 attacks. Writing in the *Washington Examiner*, Klukowski recalled that



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even as “the smoke was still rising against a clear sky over Manhattan, Pennsylvania, and Washington, people were flooding to churches across the country and prayer groups spontaneously organized in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.”

In addition to the memorial observance in Yankee Stadium, Klukowski recounted that President George Bush took time out of his harried schedule to speak at a memorial service at the National Cathedral, “and clergy of various faiths offered prayers in conjunction with the president’s remarks.” However, continued Klukowski, “Bloomberg has decreed that clergy will be excluded from the 9/11 memorial ceremony,” insisting that “the memorial schedule is too busy to allow prayer.”

Noting that public prayer “has been a staple of public events since before the founding of America and the adoption of our Constitution,” Klukowski wrote that prayer and spiritual guidance “are especially important, not to mention comforting, in moments of grief and sadness.... Moments like 9/11 remind us of the frailty of human life.” He pointed out that humanity tends to turn “in such moments to those whose calling is to study and teach these issues.... That is why those who teach the things of God participate in public memorials. Far beyond some sort of meaningless ritual or custom, public prayer both solemnizes these occasions and shines the light of sacred and eternal truths on our temporal lives here on earth.”

Current presidential candidate Rick Santorum publicly called on Bloomberg to reconsider the religious exclusion. “James Madison called our nation’s vibrant public expression of faith the ‘perfect remedy,’” declared Santorum, “and if there was ever a day in recent history that our nation needed such a remedy it was September 11th, 2001.” Calling the policy to exclude clergy and prayer from the ceremony “disconcerting,” Santorum urged the Mayor to reconsider the “unfortunate” decision. “It is important to allow clergy to attend and take part in the memorial intended to bind the wounds of a still healing nation,” he said.

*Photo: New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg*



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