

Amid trade center rubble, God walks New York streets

The Rev. Bill Armstrong is the chaplain for the Texas Task Force 1 team dispatched to New York City last week. Armstrong, minister of congregational care at Christ United Methodist Church, agreed to describe the ordeal of the rescue and recovery team as members search the rubble of the World Trade Center. The team is based at Texas A&M's Texas Engineering Extension Service.



BILL ARMSTRONG

vision you get no idea of the scope or the size of the area.

It was absolutely incredible — the ugliest mass of twisted steel I have ever seen. The shapes of the buildings' remains are ghostly and grotesque, with smoke seeping up through a score of holes that lead deep into the six stories of basements of the twin towers. One of our crews

I visited "Ground Zero" for the first time on Friday. Our task force people refer to it as "the pile." Nothing could have prepared me for this experience. I had heard about it and had seen it on television, but it wasn't like that. It was much worse. On tele-

Collapse

From A1

dropped a sensor into a void and the heat measured 1200 degrees. That is why a blaze is seen when a new void is opened.

Several buildings in the complex have fallen, and many adjacent buildings have some damage as well. There continues to be danger in the area. Some windows fell out near us and dropped 10 stories to the street. As TEEEX Director Kem Bennett and I made a 1 1/2-hour circle of the damaged area, we met several people and conversed with them amid the thousands of rescue people. One man approached me and called me "Father" because of the label "chaplain" on my hard hat.

His name was Jim Franzen, a firefighter from Chicago who used part of his vacation time to travel to New York City and help in the search and rescue effort. The area is full of heroes like Jim Franzen, who put their conscience and faith above their personal well-being.

As I toured the eight-square blocks of damaged buildings and rubble, I couldn't help but enter into theological musings. This scene is the result of incredible acts of evil and hatred. Thousands of innocent people are dead. The chaotic forms of twisted steel with no symmetry and smoke seeping upwards are a vision of hell. It is to be contrasted with the form of beauty and symmetry that once stood there: a vision of heaven.

God trudges the streets of the World Trade Center complex. God is to be seen in the sooty, tear-streaked faces of New York firefighters and police officers. God is felt in the hearts of men and women who work 16-hour days in the form of hope.

God walks the streets of New York and weeps.