As I write this article on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the United States is struggling to cope with a direct attack on our shared sense of humanity.

Families ache for loved ones who were the innocent victims of this attack. Across the country, communities gather together in awe and disbelief that such a tragedy could occur on our own soil. Undoubtedly, this disaster has personally affected members of our own community here at Holy Cross.

At this time of crisis, the magnitude of what has occurred rends the written word woefully inadequate to effectively express, explain, or console. Surely, the media and government will attempt to bring the nation to some sort of understanding through words and expressions, and similarly we will try to do the same with each other.

Of course, we all know that repeating the phrases “national tragedy” and “unspeakable evil” will never soothe the pain, but we utter them nonetheless because we also know that there are some feelings that escape the realm of verbal communication. The feeling of vulnerability. The feeling of helplessness. The feeling of loss.

I had such feelings earlier this morning. Fortunately for my family and I, it was only temporary. One minute you’re concentrating on the daily morning routine—shower, shaving, breakfast. The next, you’re wondering if that routine will ever be the same again.

“Mom, was Dad traveling today?”

Pause. Infinite in length, heart-wrenching in sound.

“Yes, Jon, he was. Please stay calm honey. He left Logan this morning, and he was on American headed to California at around quarter of eight. I’m trying to call someone right now to find the flight number. It’s OK, dear, don’t worry just yet. Is anyone there with you now? I’ll call back as soon as I figure everything out.”

By now, Friday, the death tolls have probably been estimated. Far too many, no doubt. Accordingly, I can imagine that the number of people who went through an experience similar to this, only to experience an ending far unhappier than my own.

Just think of the number of deaths, multiplied by hundreds of loving family and friends who will never be the same.

“Hello?”

“Jenny, it’s Dad. I’m OK. It was the plane next to me. I’m in Chicago, they made an emergency landing. I can’t hear you very well, but I just wanted to let you know I’m all right. I love you.”

In the coming weeks, we will hear experts discuss policy options, foreign leaders express regret, politicians give speeches, and friends talking about the events of today over dinner.

We will be told to stay strong, fight back, defend freedom, and rebuild our violated sense of trust. This is all good advice, and we will need it if we hope to someday come to terms with this disaster.

For right now, however, I ask all of you to find hope and support in the company of others. Call your grandparents and tell them you miss them. Email your friend from high school who you’ve been too busy to speak with. Let your mom know that school’s going OK.

Get your friends together and go give blood. If you know someone who has lost a loved one, the act of simply being there for him or giving her a hug communicates that you care.

Call your Dad and tell him he’s not allowed to get on a plane for at least a year.

It’s amazing to watch the effect a tragedy has on people’s otherwise busy lives. Today, I watched people walk a little slower and talk a little more. I saw people gathered together as a community to hope and pray that loved ones were safe.

I saw people being consoled, and students being turned away at Hogan because there were simply too many who were willing to give blood. I watched a Holy Cross community stop dead in their tracks to think about what matters in life and wonder how then we shall live.

We have a long way to go before normalcy returns to our national community, and the healing process will surely be perpetual, especially for those who have experienced loss. Yet, we have each other, and so we will experience this process as a family. We are a family who has quarreled in the past and amid our own share of internal turmoil, but we are also a family who has never failed to unite in times of crisis.

I have faith in our power to survive, and that faith is rooted in a belief that we will always stand by each other, get each others backs, and provide each other with a shoulder to lean on during times of trouble.

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