University, community come together to commemorate 9/11

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Many current Loyola students are young adults who have spent most of their formative years living in a world affected by 9/11. The university recognized the implications of the event on our lives and on the world by commemorating the attacks of 9/11. The university dedicated over a week, from Sept. 6 to 16, and dozens of events to the subject.

The Office of the Provost appointed a coordinating committee to plan and oversee events to mark the 10th anniversary of the attacks in a way that would be thought-provoking and inclusive of the diversity represented on campus. The committee has been meeting since early May to make sure the week’s events go smoothly. The week was named Looking Back, Looking Forward: Loyola University Chicago on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11.

The committee decided that the major themes for this week’s programming should be reflection, moving forward, inclusion and unity. “We want it to be wide open. We want the full community to come together in honoring those who lost their lives and work toward a better future,” said Kathleen Maas Weigert, Ph.D, Assistant to the Provost for Social Justice Initiatives.

She also said the committee made an effort to examine all aspects of the anniversary within the learning environment of a university. The schedule of events, which occurred from Tuesday Sept. 6 to this Friday Sept. 16, includes academic panel discussions, faith-based reflections and expressions of emotion through art. A candlelight vigil on the evening of Sept. 11 was the focal event of the series.

The vigil was held at 8 p.m. on Sunday on the East Quad outside the Information Commons. Hundreds of students attended the ceremony; coordinators ran out of the 300 candles they handed out to attendees. The vigil was meant to be the most open and most central of the commemoration events so that campus groups, individual students, faculty, staff and residents of Rogers Park could participate in a meaningful and healing way.

Megan Sandilands, a 21-year-old senior, said “It was important for me to be here because we were all old enough in 2001 to remember the attacks and we all saw the last 10 years and what resulted from Sept. 11, 2001.”

The memorial included vocal performances, a moment of silence, candle lighting and speeches, including one by university president the Rev. Fr. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J. Representatives from the Catholic Students Organization, the Muslim Students Association, the Hindu Students Organization and Hillel spoke about the widespread impact of the attacks and offered prayers for peace. After the 40-minute service ended, the audience was asked to leave the space silently out of respect for the victims of 9/11 and reverence for the “presence of God.” A single church bell tolled throughout.

“It’s important for us to unite not only as college students but also as Americans,” added Sandilands, an advertising and public relations major. “I’m glad that Loyola is providing an opportunity to remember those who lost their lives and the heroes from that day.”

Garanzini spoke about the responsibility of the university, especially the students, to examine the events of 9/11 with an academic and critical eye and move forward with care. “Actions have consequences. Loyola is called to be a community of reflection, of the exploration of truth,” he said in the speech. “We are called to be explorers of the world. A community called to reflection before action is a community of wisdom. We need this wisdom from you.”

Garanzini also explained his hopes that the diverse community of Loyola can “dedicate ourselves to a world where we can live in harmony as brothers and sisters.”

USGA President Sean Vera gave one of the featured speeches of the evening. He was a sixth-grader living in Manhattan in 2001 and saw the towers fall. He spoke about his experience at the commemoration. “I just happened to look out the window of my lower Manhattan school [when the first plane hit the north tower],” recounted the 20-year-old senior. “Watching a plane slam into a building is a sight that just can’t be forgotten.”

He said that although not many Loyola students have experiences that closely relate to the event, he knows that it has national and international consequences for our generation.

Vera, a political science and economics major, said Monday that it can be difficult for him to talk about his experiences from that day. “It’s a sensitive subject for me and it brings up a lot of memories of that day, so it’s somewhat uncomfortable for me to talk about, but I understand why it would bring value to people.”

He felt it was important for students to hear a firsthand account from someone their own age, and said that he also appreciated the inter-faith tone.

Loyola has had smaller commemorations of the date in the past, including the first anniversary, but, as Maas Weigert said, “there is something in our culture that makes big anniversaries important. We must pause and reflect before we can move forward, and we don’t ever want to forget what happened.”

Anne Hughes, Communications Specialist for the Coordinating Committee and Loyola, explained that the committee was trying to live up to the university’s motto of “Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives.”

“We want to educate our students about the past for the future,” she said.

Hundreds of Loyola students gather together with faculty, staff and members of the community to remember the events of Sept. 11.