

Once a celebration, now death in the family



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MEA-MFT PRESIDENT

‘In our response to unmitigated terror, we pray we are as restrained and merciful as we are courageous and determined to bring criminals to justice.’

When first conceived, this editorial was a celebration. We figured someone needed to celebrate a remarkable feat in the history of public employees and the labor movement in Montana and the United States.

September 1, 2001, completely without fanfare, indeed virtually without notice, MEA-MFT became one year old going strong, reveling in a near seamless merger. Our 16,000 members, our governance, our staff made a dream come true better than we had any right to anticipate. Our future is unlimited.

Oh sure, there have been bumps in the road, especially at the national level. Our two national affiliates continue to lurch along sometimes aimlessly toward unity.

We remain confident, however, that someday NEA and AFT will get it right. In this regard, this past spring and summer, NEA and AFT successfully negotiated a new national no-raid agreement and adopted a unique partnership known as NEAFT to provide “an opportunity for both organizations to engage in jointly planned ongoing activities about common concerns.”

And whereas in the last year no other NEA and AFT state affiliates merged, we hear that Texas may be next, and we note that several other states may yet take the leap. We think our merger, and mergers in Minnesota and Florida, will inspire and provide models of possibilities.

But that moment to celebrate was a decade ago in mind and spirit.

There but for the grace

A scant 10 days after our first anniversary, in an act of unimaginable horror, we all suffered death in the family. Now we grieve and are reminded how but for the grace of God there we go as well. The difference between life and death is a split second in time, razor thin in space. Death is rarely fair, seemingly always random, too frequently redundant. When death comes as it did September 11, the living must live through survivors’ guilt, grieve, and move on.

It is the moving on stuff that will show how great a people we are or want to be. In our re-

sponse to unmitigated terror, we pray we are as restrained and merciful as we are courageous and determined to bring criminals to justice.

And we must remember that as we suffer through this ordeal together, and we will suffer for a long time to come, the most enabling institution of them all, the institution our nation’s founders purposefully designed to make us a real family, a family of one nation, is public education. It is in public education that we teach, nurture, and provide hope for all God’s children, every last one of them.

May we all live in peace even as we contemplate war. ■

Hope and healing

The terrorist attacks have taken a particularly terrible toll on AFT members and families. Over 40 members of the New York State Public Employees Federation/AFT who worked in the World Trade Center are missing.

Hundreds of AFT and NEA members have lost family and dear friends.

Across the nation, our members are helping. School employees are helping students and parents cope with the tragedy. Health care members are in the front lines of the relief effort. State and city workers continue in dogged determination to keep government functioning.

AFT has created a special “AFT Recovery Fund” to coordinate assistance for families of AFT members who have been killed or injured or are missing. The fund will also assist victims, rescue personnel, and others in need. In New York, children and staff who have been evacuated from their schools need equipment, supplies, and books.

You can help. Checks can be made out to “AFT Recovery Fund,” 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036. ■