

Flag is reminder of heroic actions of Sept. 11

YORK, Pa. (CNS) – Students and faculty members at York Catholic High School now have a vivid reminder of the heroism of firefighters who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City through an American flag with an image of the New York City skyline displayed at the entrance to their school auditorium.

The flag was obtained through a connection established by the school's religion teacher, Father William Cawley. Five years ago the priest scrolled through a memorial Web site of New York firefighters who died in the terrorist attacks and he came across someone with the same last name as his, although he was no relation.

The priest did some research and found that firefighter Michael Cawley had graduated from Archbishop Molloy High School in Queens, N.Y.

He also learned that the young man, who was in his early 30s, had been detailed from his unit in Queens into Manhattan because the fire company had been short of personnel that day and he begged to go along.

Michael Cawley was the only person from his firehouse who died in the attacks. His body was found several weeks later. He is survived by his parents, Margaret and Jack, and two younger siblings, Kristin, a nurse, and Brendan, who currently is a firefighter and wears his older brother's badge number.

Around Christmas of 2001, Father Cawley sent a contribution in Michael Cawley's name to Archbishop Molloy High School and sent a letter to his surviving family. The family, in turn, was so touched that they chose to make a donation in their son's memory to York Catholic High School.

Margaret Cawley asked for ideas for possible school donations and Father Cawley suggested either restoring the chalices used for school Masses or providing a projection system for liturgies. The Cawleys decided to contribute to both.

Once the chalice restoration was complete, the priest met the Cawley family and

many of Michael's former classmates at the family's Long Island summer home. He celebrated a memorial Mass for the firefighter using the chalice.

"It was one of the finest moments of my priesthood, without a doubt," Father Cawley told The Catholic Witness, diocesan newspaper of Harrisburg.

It turned out the chalice and the projection system were not the last gifts York Catholic would receive from the Cawleys. This past fall, the family donated to the school auction a special memorial flag they had received for the fifth anniversary of Sept. 11 attacks. The flag was purchased for \$1,600 by longtime supporters and graduates of York Catholic High School who specified that the flag should initially be displayed at the school.

Father Cawley said the flag's message was twofold. He thought it would enhance an appreciation of the rights and freedoms in America for students and faculty members and would also symbolize the bravery and sacrifice of those who died that day.

The flag's impact was felt right away.

When Anne Bahn, the school's development director, carried the flag into the school, teachers and students in the hallway stopped what they were doing and stood quietly.