The Pews at St. Paul’s Chapel
The chapel where the pews are found is located directly across the street from Ground Zero. Built in 1764, it is the oldest surviving church in Manhattan.

The chapel stood strong on 9/11 even as “giants around it had come to a fall.”

“The Little Chapel That Stood”

Photo of St. Paul’s Chapel from Trinity Place, showing the church yard. Photo by Arnold Moses.
http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/ny/ny0400/ny0420/photos/119362pu.tif
On the grounds is a historic cemetery with burial stones dating to 1704 and the remains of a village green that was the site of the Election of 1733.
The World Trade Center served as a backdrop for the photo on the left. The steeple of St. Paul’s Chapel is in the foreground.

Over the eight months following 9/11, St. Paul’s operated full time as a relief site for emergency workers, keeping its doors open around the clock in order to provide food, respite and sanctuary.
On September 11, 2001, the church yard was filled with debris, but only one tree was felled.

It was a giant sycamore tree, almost a century old.

Not a pane of glass in the chapel had been broken nor were any headstones damaged.
Among the pews inside of the chapel were many displays honoring the fallen heroes of 9/11.
These peace cranes represent some of the thousands that were sent from Japan. Some came from survivors of the World War II bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Why do you think those survivors sent these cranes to America?
Children from around the world sent hand tracings with messages of hope, sadness, honor, and peace.

Children from near and far away wanted their voices to be heard. What do you think they were trying to say? To whom were they speaking?
This signed banner was sent to the chapel for the workers at Ground Zero from Oklahoma. Why do you think this state chose to make this gesture?
One display allowed visitors to leave personal messages.

What might you have written?
The pews were an unintended tribute to the Ground Zero workers and the victims.

The marks left on the pews were made by the boots and heavy equipment worn by members of the fire department and other workers.
The pews provided not only a quiet resting place but a thoughtful and safe place for reflection, as well.
Only Ground Zero workers, church personnel, and other approved people were allowed to enter St. Paul’s during the eight-week period the church served as a sanctuary for rescue workers and volunteers. The church was not open to the public during this time.

Photographers were asked NOT to take photos of the people who used this church as a quiet place of reflection during the rescue and recovery operations.

*Do you think that request was appropriate? Fair? Too restricted? Compassionate?*
In 2008, those damaged pews were replaced with free-standing chairs to allow for more flexibility and larger audiences.

St. Paul’s Chapel receives over 25,000 visitors each year.
Two of the damaged pews have been left in St. Paul’s Chapel as a memento to the workers and victims of 9/11.
Unless otherwise noted, all photos are courtesy of Vernoy Paolini.