

# Community sees schoolhouse attack as 'Amish 9/11'

October 13, 2006

Posted: 10/13/06

## Amish isolated but still vulnerable to violence

**By Mary Warner**

*Religion News Service*

HARRISBURG, Pa. (RNS)—The [Amish](#) teach their children that a gun is for hunting wild game, and any other use is a sin. They do not serve in the military. They reject the use of violence, even in self-defense.

---

Amish girls  
talk to a  
state  
trooper at  
the scene of  
the  
Georgetown  
school  
shootings in  
Nickel  
Mines, near  
Lancaster,  
Pa.  
(REUTERS  
Photo by  
Tim  
Shaffer)

They organize their community around their church and draw sharp boundaries around it—keeping out the violent and sexual images from television and movies.

“We imagine the Amish more immune,” said [David Weaver-Zercher](#), religion professor at Messiah College, hours after a gunman burst into a one-room school in Lancaster County and killed five Amish girls.

“It underscored—as if we needed it underscored—that even the communities that appear to be the most isolated and most immune from violence are nevertheless vulnerable.”

The Amish began migrating to the United States from Europe in the 18th century, largely to avoid religious persecution and compulsory military service. Lancaster County has one of their largest communities—about

25,000 to 30,000 people, supporting themselves with farming and small businesses.

The Amish often own hunting rifles. Peter Siebert, director of the [Lancaster Heritage Center](#), said some Amish businesses close on the first day of deer season. But a gun to the Amish is like a plow, he said: It's a tool.

**See Related Articles:**

- [Community sees schoolhouse attack as 'Amish 9/11'](#)
- [How will the Amish cope with school shooting?](#)
- [Amish remember gunman as good neighbor, family man](#)
- Amish isolated but still vulnerable to violence

There have been rare occasions when “disturbed Amish people did violent things to their families,” said Weaver-Zercher. “But to respond violently is so out of character, so far from the Amish worldview ... that it never occurred to me” to wonder if the gunman was Amish. He was not.

The terrible news was no doubt traveling quickly, he said, via the efficient Amish grapevine.

The Amish don't have phones at home, but sometimes a few families share a phone in a shed between farms. Many Amish businessmen have phones in their shops. And there are non-Amish (“English”) friends with televisions.

Eventually, the Amish might entertain questions about how their schools might be made safer, said Weaver-Zercher. That sounds difficult, given how numerous they are, and “you’re not going to have an Amish bishop with a shotgun out in front,” he said.

Still, he predicted in coming weeks Amish leaders will gather and invite some “English” civic leaders whom they trust for a conversation about safety.

In the meantime, the days following the killings were filled with funerals—at homes or in barns or large shops, because the Amish have no separate houses of worship, said [Donald Kraybill](#), an Elizabethtown College sociologist and expert on the Amish.

“The focus will be on accepting it, and on forgiveness,” he said, adding the Amish “take seriously the words of Jesus to love enemies and not to respond to violence with violence.”

*Mary Warner writes for The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, Pa.*

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.