

Amish response to violence rated top 2006 newsmaker

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An Amish family arrives to pay their respects at the White Oak farm of Chris and Rachel Miller, who lost two daughters when a gunman killed five girls at an Amish school. (RNS photo by Robert Sciarrino/*The Star-Ledger* of Newark, N.J.)

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Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—The Amish community that inspired the world with acts of forgiveness after a Pennsylvania schoolhouse shooting has been named the newsmaker of the year for 2006 by the Religion Newswriters Association and Beliefnet.

The multi-faith spirituality website Beliefnet.com noted the Amish community topped its list of newsmakers for demonstrating “courage, forgiveness, self-sacrifice and love” after a gunman entered an Amish schoolhouse in October and shot 10 girls before taking his own life. The Amish community reached out to the killer’s family, offering monetary and emotional support. Several attended his funeral.

The Amish also were rated the year’s top newsmaker in a separate poll of 149 religion reporters. They voted on their picks as the 10 most important stories of the year and the single biggest newsmaker.

The Religion Newswriters Association top 10 stories were:

1. **Muslims throughout the world** react violently after the publication of Muhammad cartoons in several European nations. Christians and Muslims are killed when riots erupt in Nigeria.
2. **Pope Benedict XVI** touches off more Muslim anger by referencing a centuries-old quote linking Islam and violence during a speech. He apologizes and calms the uproar during a trip to Turkey.
3. **The Episcopal Church** infuriates conservatives during its general

convention by electing Katharine Jefferts Schori—who supported the consecration of an openly gay bishop—as the first woman to its top post. Several dioceses throughout the nation adopt measures that set the stage for secession from the denomination.

4. **Evangelical Ted Haggard** resigns as president of the National Association of Evangelicals and is dismissed as pastor of his Colorado Springs, Colo., megachurch after he is accused of engaging in gay sex and using drugs.

5. **Many Republican candidates** backed by the religious right are defeated in the fall elections, with a significant number of voters claiming morality was one of the strongest motivators in their decision-making at the polls.

6. **Religious voices grow louder for peace** in Iraq as conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslims rises. Israeli incursions in Lebanon aimed at curbing attacks by Hezbollah ignite more strife in the Middle East, and Christian churches reconsider efforts to pressure Israel on the Palestinian question.

7. **The schoolhouse murder of five Amish girls** in Nickel Mines, Pa., highlights the Amish community's ethic of forgiveness when several Amish attend the killer's funeral.

8. (tie) **The film *The Da Vinci Code*** hits theaters, prompting more outrage over Dan Brown's novel. Religious critics cite controversial plot lines, including Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene and conceiving a child.

8. (tie) **Same-sex marriage bans** pass in seven of eight states voting on the issue during the midterm elections. Arizona becomes the first state to defeat such a ban. New Jersey's Supreme Court decides same-sex marriage couples deserve the same rights as heterosexual couples.

10. **President Bush vetoes a bill** calling for expanded stem-cell research. Progress is reported in efforts to create stem-cell lines without destroying embryos.

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