

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE CHAPLAIN MINISTRY  
AT THE AMISH SCHOOLHOUSE SHOOTING**

*The following account of Police Chaplaincy ministry with the Pennsylvania State Police at "The Amish Schoolhouse Shooting" is by your Police Chaplain Grover Devault, retired Army IFCA International Chaplain.*

It was early Monday morning that the phone began to ring off the hook. First a Lt. from the Pennsylvania State Police, then another from Emerville, in Chester County, then another from Avondale PA, and finally Headquarters, at "J" Troop station in Lancaster. "Come as quickly as you can" was the urgent cry. "We need you!"

As soon as I arrived at Headquarters a Lt. put me in his patrol car and we sped to the Amish Schoolhouse in Bart Township where I saw that horrible scene just about 45 minutes after the shooting took place. Helicopters were landing and taking off with those girls who were wounded. Several who were dead at the school remained on the ground or in the one room school. Dear little Amish girls. The team of State Police were gathering together and the Commissioner, Col. Miller had just arrived via helicopter. Our men and women performed professionally and with personal care for all.

First I addressed, individually, those troopers who had blood on them and who had lifted the girls out of the classroom and one trooper who had cut his hand breaking into the windows to get at 32 year old, Charles Carl Roberts IV who had stormed the classroom and brandished a gun. He was discovered lying dead on the floor having shot himself. Our SERT (or SWAT as some call it) had rushed the building when communications had failed. They had to break the windows because the doors were barred.

After attending the troopers, at their request, I spoke with the Amish Bishop, Jacob Fisher and his two helpers, Chris Peterson and Dan Bonner. They sat on the ground on a little incline near the fence of the schoolhouse. They were quite shocked and needed some comfort. I asked how I could help them and they asked to be allowed to go to the farmhouse, about 3/4 miles away to be with the families of the children. A trooper provided a patrol car to take me along with them to the farmhouse where the owner invited us in to speak with the teacher, Miss Emma Zook. I needed to get the police the names of the girls. She provided me the names of Marian Fisher 7, (now dead), Esther King 7, (hospital), Anna Mae Stolsfoze 12, (dead), Barbie Fisher (hospital), Emma Fisher (hospital), Mary Liz Miller 8, (now dead), Rachel Ann Stolfoze (hospital), Sarah Ann Stolfoze (hospital), Lena Miller 7, (now dead), Naomi Rose Ebenshade (now dead), and Rosanna King (hospital). That was the account known at the time. We did not know where each of them were at that time, but our Commissioner, Col. Miller offered to send any parents by helicopter to any of the hospitals if they so desired. None took up that offer since vans were waiting to transport them.

I asked Bishop Jacob Fisher if he would like me to lead all the parents gathered in the farmhouse in prayer and he said "Yes, and please stand in the middle of the room so all can hear." I prayed like never before. He followed reading prayers from a PA Dutch worship book.

For the rest of Monday I did debriefings with the troopers and returned the next day to speak with more of the Amish to see how we (PSP) could best serve them. As a group of several elders gathered, I worked with them to discover their needs and present them to our men.

God blessed and I thank you all for your prayers for me as I minister the Gospel to these men and women. I will be working this week with them again to do "follow-up".

**October 9, 2006**

Today I was again invited to the Amish Schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, PA to speak with the Bishop, Ruben Fisher, on behalf the Pennsylvania State Police. I came in the same police patrol car that carried

me down there last Monday. I was asked by my superiors to seek out the Bishop and find out if we could do anything more by way of debriefing or counseling to those in need in the Amish community. They had their own way of doing things, and their faith to sustain them. They did not want any assistance, but asked if they could pay the State Police for their assistance. (Of course they could not!)

What I witnessed was an amazing act of therapy by the male leaders of the Amish community as they asked the boys and the parents to return to the schoolhouse (now all cleaned up and put back like it was, except for the broken out windows.) The children obediently turned out and they sat at their regular desks. The teacher, Miss Emma May Zook also returned. She seems so small and fragile and still in some shock. I spoke with her and reassured her that what she did was God's will in escaping and making that call to the State Police. She looked down and Bishop Fisher said "What you have said was a good thing!" The boys then all gathered in the entrance to the one room school and rang the school bell at just 10:45A.M. as did all the churches in Lancaster city and county. The bell stopped after one hard tug and two of the boys scrambled up on the roof to release it so it could be rung again as all members of the community bowed their heads in prayer. It was so moving I had tears in my eyes and my hands shook.

I asked the Bishop if we, the State Police, could do anything further. He asked me just how were they to spend the money that was being given to them. We talked of several needs they had. I informed him that churches like ours were giving them money to meet their needs. Then he asked a most surprising question, "How can we give money to the State Police for all they have done?" I replied, " We are paid by tax payers and do not need your money, but thank you so much for such a kind and generous offer." We had a prayer of blessing and I returned to the J Troop Headquarters.

### **October 12, 2006**

Yesterday I spent the whole day in what is known as "de-briefing" the troopers. First, the command staff, officers who were at the scene, then troopers who were "inside the schoolhouse and yard", and then any others who were in the area at all. We covered many topics that would affect them and their spouses and children in the days ahead. Some told stories of how the events affected them and made many self-disclosures. For some it has been very painful and they needed days off to recover. Holding children dead or dying in their arms is really traumatic. When I arrived on the scene they were blood-covered and had just placed the little Amish girls in the helicopters. I want to be available for them to talk, or be quiet, but to be God's messenger of mercy, grace, and love for them.

I plan to just spend time with those I have come to know in this special ministry over the past three years at Lancaster, Ephrata, Emerville, and Avondale. We have the very best in law enforcement people. Their professionalism and quality of life speaks for itself. I am honored and most proud to be associated with them. Do continue to pray for them.

Grover