

## Your Personal Response to Violence

*A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay printed in the Quad Community Press on June 30, 2015*

With the tragedy in Charleston, South Carolina fresh on our minds, many wonder how this world can ever begin to create more peaceful communities. People are advocating for change in our laws and in our culture, and that is all well and good.

As a community leader, I often think about solutions from a city-wide perspective or sometimes I see a need for county, state or national action. But as a Christian I think about starting with myself: Am I living my life the right way? Am I being an instrument of God's peace?

There is a need for each of us to consider what we as individuals can do to help create the kind of community we want for ourselves and our children. I have attended training for the 'Green Dot' program and I think this could be part of the solution.

What is Green Dot? Police in some big cities place a red dot on the map to mark a violent action. Green Dot ([www.livethegreendot.org](http://www.livethegreendot.org)) trains people to consider how they will respond to a difficult situation that could go turn into something worse. Their action to help defuse an act of bullying, a loud argument, or any inappropriate event that could become a more serious violent behavior, puts a Green Dot on the map. Imagine a community map that has more green dots than red! What a message that would send about how people treat and watch out for each other; about expectations of positive behavior stating loud and clear that violence is not the way to resolve conflicts in our community!

Let me share an example: you are in the parking lot of a grocery store when you come across an exasperated mother violently shaking her screaming young child by the arm and saying, "knock it off or you're really going to get it." Do you freeze, not knowing what to do? Or do you avoid the situation, feeling horrible but telling yourself it's not really your problem? Who steps up to help that child?

With Green Dot training, I learned three ways I could respond: I could be direct (walk up to the mother and tell her to stop); I could distract her (walk up and ask the mother for directions to 35W or where an ATM machine might be); or I could delegate (call the police or tell someone in authority). Your goal is to break the moment, to get the party to stop, if only for this time and place. Your action may have kept the situation from getting worse. That's a Green Dot!

You have taken a small step to help avoid violent situations in your community. And you are helping set an expectation that small acts of violence will not be tolerated—you want a peaceful community.

Like many of you, I have felt the regret of not stepping up when I came across seemingly small acts of disrespect or violence. For every bully and victim there are many bystanders who saw it happen and did nothing. For every neighbor of a domestic violence household there is the regret of not helping in some small way. Now I am not suggesting that you should put yourself in harms way. We need to keep ourselves safe, but let's move beyond inaction. Let's each determine how we will respond to these situations.

Sometimes you will step up and sometimes you should call the police. But do something - send the message that disrespect and violence in whatever form is not acceptable behavior in your community.