

# What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Keith Chuvala, [Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com](mailto:Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com)

## The Mennonites

From <http://mennoniteusa.org>

### Mennonites are ...

#### ... Christians

We believe in the lordship and saving grace of Jesus Christ. We yearn to grow more like Christ. We believe in the triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### ... Anabaptists

We are neither Catholic nor Protestant, but we share ties to those streams of Christianity. We cooperate as a sign of our unity in Christ and in ways that extend the reign of God's Kingdom on earth. We are known as "Anabaptists" (not anti-Baptist) — meaning "rebaptizers."

The Anabaptist movement began in the 16th Century in Europe. In Europe during the 16th century, our faith ancestors broke away from the state religion's practice of baptizing infants. As they looked to the scriptures for guidance, they believed that only adults could make a decision to follow Jesus Christ and be baptized voluntarily. So they "rebaptized" as adults those whom the Church had already baptized as infants. It was considered a heresy to do so, and many were persecuted and even killed for their actions and beliefs. Rather than baptize our infants, many families participate in a service of dedication of their children to God. The parents ask their congregation to help them train their child in the way of Jesus Christ. Our hope is that our children will choose to follow Jesus Christ and be baptized, but we leave that decision to them as they mature into adulthood

#### ... Named after Menno Simons

While we called ourselves "Anabaptists" in the 1500s, others nicknamed us the "Mennonites" after one of our early leaders, Menno Simons, a Catholic priest who aligned himself with the Anabaptists in 1536. The nickname stuck. And after 500 years, we're still known as the Mennonites.



There are books devoted to Menno Simons and his contributions to our faith, as well as many writings by him. In every publication written by Menno Simons, he included a verse from 1 Corinthians 3:11: "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." To Menno Simons, this verse summed up the whole Anabaptist movement: There is no source or authority for the Christian Church other than Jesus Christ. The centrality of Jesus Christ and our formation as followers of Christ remains the number one priority of Mennonite Church USA today.

## **Mennonites are not ...**

### ... A closed group

Mennonites value the sense of family and community that comes with a shared vision of following Jesus Christ, accountability to one another and the ability to agree and disagree in love. We are not a closed group. You are welcome to join us as together we follow Jesus and pursue Christ's purpose in the world. Our vision is one of healing and hope. God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

### ... Amish

We find that many people asking about Mennonites are actually thinking of the Amish or "Old Order Mennonites." Mennonites and Amish come from the same Anabaptist tradition begun in the 16th century, but there are differences in how we live out our Christian values. The distinctiveness of the Amish is in their separation from the society around them. They generally shun modern technology, keep out of political and secular involvements and dress plainly.



### **Visual Identity**

A visual design to unite us and remind us of who we are

Time after time, the Spirit in the form of a dove announces the coming of God to us. As Mennonites, we recognize the centrality of Christ as proclaimed in Scripture, revealed through the Holy Spirit and discerned in Christian community. The dove represents Jesus and the missional calling to follow him into the world — gracefully, joyfully and peacefully.

---

The Mennonite Church history website identifies five "denominations":

- Mennonite Brethren Church US Conference
- Mennonite Brethren Church Canadian Conference
- Mennonite World Conference
- Mennonite Church Canada
- Mennonite Church USA

## **History of Mennonites in Europe**

The Anabaptist movement was born (at least in an organized sense) out of the Reformation. The movement was particularly strong in Switzerland. However, the Roman Catholic Church considered the movement to be heretical. So Anabaptists in Switzerland had to move from European provinces to other areas because of persecution. Menno Simon's own brother was killed in an attack on the movement.

According to historians, many Anabaptists in Europe were imprisoned or executed. Helping Anabaptists was considered a crime and those who sheltered Simons were punished. Even those who recanted this "new" religion and tried to return to the Roman Catholic Church were often not pardoned. Anabaptist history holds that many Reformation-era Anabaptists were hunted down and killed on the spot without trial or sentence.

## **Pacifism**

According to the Mennonite USA website, Mennonites hold a strong belief in peace, justice and nonresistance. The group believes that God's peace is "most fully revealed in Jesus Christ" and they are responsible for following Christ "in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation and practicing nonresistance even in the face of violence and warfare."

Mennonites say violence is "not the will of God" and violence includes war, hostility among races and classes, child abuse, abuse of women, any violence between man and woman, abortion and capital punishment. Many Mennonites do not enlist and during World War II, those who served worked in Civilian Public Service rather than in the fighting forces. Even more, some do not even pay the portion of taxes that is earmarked for the military.

## **Schisms and Polity**

Mennonites are not governed by a centralized hierarchy. Many Anabaptist/Mennonite groups, however, align voluntarily under the Mennonite World Conference, which refers to itself as a "community of churches." The Mennonite World Conference claims 102 churches in over 80 countries. There are about 40 distinct Mennonite groups in the United States; the largest of these is the Mennonite Church USA. It is estimated that there are about 2.1 million Mennonites world-wide.

The Anabaptist/Mennonite movement has generated a number of splinter groups that become effectively separate churches. Most notable, perhaps, is the group that became better known as the Old Order Amish.

One early split occurred in 1778 when Bishop Christian Funk supported the American Revolution. He was excommunicated and formed the "Funkites" (I am not making this up!) Later, the "Orthodox Reformed Mennonite Church was formed", as was the "Church of God in Christ, Mennonite", among others.

Most recently, there has been division among Mennonites on the issue of homosexuality. While the Mennonite Church USA officially views homosexuality as a sin and defines marriage between one man

and one woman, many recent policies have seemed to support LGBT initiatives. The church has fired pastors and reprimanded officials for conducting LGBT weddings, but the Mennonite Church USA has also reportedly implemented some other LGBT support policies. In response, earlier this year, the Lancaster Mennonite Conference officially separated from the Mennonite Church USA over the national group's changing views on homosexuality.

The Lancaster Mennonite Conference is the largest group of Mennonite congregations in the U.S. It includes about 179 congregations in New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. A Pennsylvania pastor said of the decision, "We are in a sense not really leaving. They are the ones that essentially have left true biblical Christianity in this respect."

### **A Christian Church**

Mennonites believe in salvation through Jesus and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. They believe that God is Triune. Their core beliefs are very much in line with many American Protestant denominations. Per the Mennonite USA web site, the church believes that "...through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God offers salvation from sin and a new way of life to all people."

Typical of Anabaptist groups, the church considers baptism to be an outward sign of inward cleansing, a public pledge before the church, and a testimony to "God's gift of the Holy Spirit." The Lord's Supper is also considered to be symbolic

Mennonites also encourage the practice of foot washing. "Believers who wash each other's feet show that they share in the body of Christ. They thus acknowledge their frequent need of cleansing, renew their willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer their lives in humble service and sacrificial love."

The group also believes that if "an erring member persists in sin without repentance and rejects even the admonition of the congregation," he or she may be suspended or excommunicated. According to the church's Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, the church will continue to pray for that person to be restored to the church.

### **The Mennonite Dress Code**

*Some* Mennonite groups have rules on clothing. Because they are often confused with Amish, many people believe that Mennonites adhere to a strict dress code. In reality, what is worn depends on the specific Mennonite church.

Many modern Mennonite churches do not have any dress codes, even for women. However, there are some conservative sects of Mennonites that dress in a way to encourage modesty and separation from society. Women may wear dresses or head coverings.

Other rules on lifestyle also vary depending on the church. The various Mennonite groups in the U.S. "vary in the way we dress, worship and relate to the world," according to the Mennonite Church USA. As a rule, Mennonites welcome others to visit their churches. They also allow the use of technology and secular involvement in the world.

From <http://thirdway.com/>

Highlights from the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective adopted by the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church in 1995:

- We believe that God exists and that God became flesh through Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world. We believe in the Holy Spirit and that all Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit.
- We believe that God created the world and that God created human beings in God's image. We believe that humanity has sinned but that through Jesus, God offers salvation and a new way of life.
- We believe that the church is the assembly of those who have accepted salvation through faith in Jesus and that the church's mission is to proclaim the kingdom of God and to make disciples.
- We believe that baptism of believers with water is a sign of cleansing from sin and a pledge to walk in Jesus' way. We believe that the Lord's Supper (Communion) is a sign by which the church remembers the new covenant which Jesus established by his death. We believe that in washing the feet of his disciples Jesus calls us to serve one another in love as he did. We practice discipline in the church as a sign of God's offer of transforming grace.
- We believe that ministry is a continuation of the work of Christ. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is one body with many members and that Jesus calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him.
- We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit. We believe that God intends human life to begin in families and to be blessed through families. Even more, God desires all people to become part of the church, God's family. We are called to chastity and to loving faithfulness in marriage.
- We are committed to telling the truth, to avoid the swearing of oaths, to live in faithful stewardship of all that God has given us. We believe that peace is the will of God and that led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance, even in the face of violence and warfare.
- We believe that the church is God's holy nation. We place our hope in the reign of God and its fulfillment in the day when Christ will come again.