

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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The Amish

Amish Groups

- The Old Order Amish, who live in rural communities in North America and are famous for their plain dress and limited use of technology. The group emerged from the split into Old Order Amish and Amish Mennonites in the decades after 1862.
- The Amish Mennonites, a broad term used for churches that emerged from the split after 1862 and later mostly became Mennonites with few exceptions, the most notably being the Kauffman Amish Mennonites.
- The Egly Amish, more Evangelical than the other Amish, had already withdrawn from the Amish church in 1858. They soon drifted away from the old ways and changed their name to "Defenseless Mennonite" in 1908, to "Evangelical Mennonite Church" in 1942, and then to "Fellowship of Evangelical Churches" in 2003.
- The Stuckey Amish (Mennonites) of Illinois, more progressive than the Amish Mennonites, emerged from a split in 1872, organized as a conference in 1899 and joined the General Conference Mennonite Church as a district conference in 1945. In 1957 they merged with the Middle District Conference to form the Central District of the General Conference Mennonite Church.
- The Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference, that emerged in 1910 among Amish congregations that took no side in the split after 1862. They dropped the word "Amish" from their name in 1957. They were more liberal than the Old Orders but more conservative than the Amish Mennonites.
- The Beachy Amish, a car driving group with a few restrictions on technologies. In many aspects they resemble Conservative Mennonites. They emerged from the Old Orders in a process that started in 1927.
- The New Order Amish, a Plain dress, horse and buggy group, formed in 1966, that is more liberal concerning technologies than most Old Order Amish. Some of them use electricity in the home. They do not practice shunning.



Background and History

The Amish are known for being conservative, traditionalist Christian church fellowships with Swiss-German Anabaptist origins. They are related to, but distinct from, Mennonite churches. The Amish are known for simple living, plain dress, and reluctance to adopt many conveniences of modern technology.

The history of the Amish church began with a schism in Switzerland within a group of Swiss and Alsatian Anabaptists in 1693 led by Jakob Ammann. Those who followed Ammann became known as Amish. In the late 1800's, the Amish divided into Old Order Amish and Amish Mennonites. The latter mostly drive cars and use modern technology, while the Old Order Amish retain much of their traditional culture. In modern American culture, the word "Amish" is usually used to refer to the Old Order Amish, because they are so noticeably different from the rest of American society.

The term "Amish" was first used as a ***Schandename*** (a term of disparagement) by opponents of Jakob Amman. The first informal division between Swiss Brethren was recorded in the 17th century between Oberländers (those living in the hills) and Emmentaler (those living in the Emmental valley), over disagreement about the proper treatment of "fallen" believers, specifically whether they should only be withheld from communion, or communion and regular family meals.

The Amish in America

The Amish began migrating to Pennsylvania, then known for its religious toleration, in the 18th century due to religious wars, poverty, and religious persecution in Europe. The first Amish immigrants went to Berks County, Pennsylvania, but later moved, motivated by land issues and by security concerns tied to the French and Indian War. Many eventually settled in Lancaster County. Other groups later settled elsewhere in North America.

Today, the Old Order Amish, the New Order Amish, and the Old Beachy Amish continue to speak Pennsylvania German, also known as "Pennsylvania Dutch". Two different Alemannic dialects are used by Old Order Amish in Adams and Allen counties in Indiana.

Amish Life

Amish church membership begins with baptism, usually between the ages of 16 and 23. It is a requirement for marriage within the Amish church. Once a person is baptized

within the church, he or she may marry only within the faith. Church “districts” are quite small, averaging between 20 and 40 families. Worship services are held every other Sunday in a member's home. Each district is led by a bishop, who is assisted by ministers and deacons. The rules of the church, “**the Ordnung**,” must be observed by every member and cover many aspects of day-to-day living, including prohibitions or limitations on the use of power-line electricity, telephones, and automobiles, as well as regulations on clothing. Most Amish do not buy commercial insurance or participate in Social Security. As pacifist Anabaptists, Amish church members practice nonresistance and will not perform any type of military service. The Amish value rural life, manual labor, and humility, all under the auspices of living what they consider to be adherence to the Bible.

During an adolescent period of *rumspringa* ("running around") in some communities, nonconforming behavior that would result in the shunning of an adult who had made the permanent commitment of baptism, may be met with a degree of forbearance. Amish church groups seek to maintain a degree of separation from the non-Amish world. Non-Amish people are generally referred to as 'English'.

A heavy emphasis is placed on church and family relationships. Amish communities typically operate their own one-room schools, and adherents tend to discontinue formal education after eighth grade. Until the children turn 16, they have vocational training under the tutelage of their parents, community, and the school teacher.

Higher education is generally discouraged, as it can lead to social segregation and the unraveling of the community. However, some Amish women have used higher education to obtain a nursing certificate so that they may provide midwifery services to the community.

Church Discipline

Members who do not conform to these community expectations and who cannot be convinced to repent are excommunicated. In addition to excommunication, members may be **shunned**, a practice that limits social contacts to shame the wayward member into returning to the church. Almost 90 percent of Amish teenagers choose to be baptized and join the church.

Quoted or adapted from <https://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-faith/>

Amish Beliefs

“It is difficult to explain in a few sentences what the Amish people believe. This is a very simplified statement. As Amish and Mennonites, we believe that God loved the world so much that he gave his only son to die on the cross and that through faith in the shed blood of Jesus we are reconciled to God. We believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, that as Christians we should live as brothers, that the church is separate from the State, that we are committed to peace, and that faith calls for a lifestyle of discipleship and good works.

“Both Mennonites and Amish believe in one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17). We believe that Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, died on the cross for the sins of the world. We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, and also empowers believers for service and holy living. We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, a free gift bestowed by God on those who repent and believe.

One scripture often quoted in Amish worship services is: “Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2) They are admonished to live a life that is separate from the world.”

What is this thing called the Ordnung that the Amish live by?

“Donald B. Kraybill in his book, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, writes: ‘The Amish blueprint for expected behavior, called the Ordnung, regulates private, public, and ceremonial life. Ordnung does not translate readily into English. Sometimes rendered as “ordnance” or “discipline,” the Ordnung is best thought of as an ordering of the whole way of life . . . a code of conduct which the church maintains by tradition rather than by systematic or explicit rules. A member noted: “The order is not written down. The people just know it, that’s all.” Rather than a packet of rules to memorize, the Ordnung is the “understood” behavior by which the Amish are expected to live. In the same way that the rules of grammar are learned by children, so the Ordnung, the grammar of order, is learned by Amish youth. The Ordnung evolved gradually over the decades as the church sought to strike a delicate balance between tradition and change. Specific details of the Ordnung vary across church districts and settlements.’”

Shunning

“The term “church members” means those who are baptized as adults and voluntarily commit themselves to a life of obedience to God and the church. Yes, those who break their baptismal vows are shunned by the Old Order Amish. “Belonging” is important and shunning is meant to be redemptive. It is not an attempt to harm or ruin the individual and in most cases it does bring that member back into the fellowship again. Actually, the number of members excommunicated and shunned by the Amish is small.

The Biblical basis for shunning is found in these two verses: “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (I Corinthians 5:11)

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and of fences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17)

The families of a shunned member are expected to also shun them. Families shun the person by not eating at the same table with them. The practice of shunning makes family gatherings especially awkward.”

Photographs

“Old Order Amish and Mennonites forbid photography of their people, and their objection is based on the second commandment, Exodus 20:4: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”.”

Do the Amish consider non-Amish Christians to be saved?

“The Amish have deliberately made decisions as to what will or will not be allowed among members of the Amish community. The Amish do not pass judgment on outsiders.”

The Amish and the Great Commission

“Early Anabaptists, the ancestors of Amish and Mennonites, were very evangelistic, going everywhere preaching and teaching. This was a sharp contrast to the “Christian” society in which they lived. Persecution followed and many Anabaptists died for their faith and their zeal for evangelism. In the years that followed, missionary zeal decreased. The church succumbed to persecution and discrimination. Gradually Amish

and Mennonites became known more for their traditional practices and their quiet, peaceful way of life and less for their active evangelism. This trend continued until it seemed almost wrong to send members out of the close community to evangelize. Old Order Amish, along with some Old Order Mennonites, have retained this position and desire to remain “the quiet in the land.” However, missionary zeal experienced a strong rebirth around the beginning of this century in Mennonite circles and more recently among the Church Amish. As a result of this rebirth of evangelism, Mennonites today number more than one million people in over 60 countries around the world and speak 78 different languages.”

Pacifism

“Both Amish and Mennonites are committed to a lifestyle of peace and non-violence. Yes, this pervades every aspect of life. However, no one can predict with certainty how anyone would really react to an absolutely unprecedented crisis such as described above. Emotions as well as thoughts are involved and the situation is personalized. Having said this, we would hope that as people who have practiced a lifestyle of peace, we would not resort to force and violence in a crisis situation such as the one described.

- There is no assurance that use of force would save my life or the life of my family if confronted by an attacker.
- We could recall many accounts of unhopd for deliverances, whether by mediation, nature, or divine Providence, when Christians refused to use force when confronted by an attacker.
- If the result is death at the hands of the attacker, so be it; death is not threatening to us as Christians. Hopefully the attacker will have at least had a glimpse of the love of Christ in our nonviolent response.
- The Christian does not choose a nonviolent approach to conflict because of assurance it will always work; rather the Christian chooses this approach because of his/her commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

The analogy to war in the situation described above tends to break down when we think of the vast preparations for war — accumulation of weapons, training of the military, etc. War is planned and seldom is aggression so clearly defined with the defense staying on its home turf.