

Religions in America: Mennonites

Who are the Mennonites?

Where most of them live: Mennonite churches are mostly in the Northeast, Midwest, and Great Plains. They seem to be strongest from Pennsylvania to Iowa.

How many people are Mennonite in the U.S.? About 350,000, plus about 370,000 in related churches.

How long has the Mennonite church been here? The Mennonite church started in the mid 1500's in Europe. Mennonites first came to the U.S. when some moved to Pennsylvania in 1683.

Mennonites are well known for: Quiet conservative living, pacifism (not believing in war or joining the military), and sometimes keeping old ways of life (Amish).

Names of some Mennonite groups: Mennonite Church, Conservative Mennonite Conference, and the Amana Church Society. Some related groups are the Church of the Brethren and Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

Where is their teaching from?

Mennonites say all Christian knowledge is from the Bible. Notice they emphasize knowledge. For Mennonites, faith is less important, knowledge and living are more important. So for them, the Bible is more like God's word that teaches us about life than God's word that shows Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Mennonites also emphasize an "inner light." They say if you don't have a special spiritual experience with Christ, then you can't really understand the Bible. They say the Holy Spirit must be in you to guide you in the truth. Otherwise, you can't understand the Bible. What does the Bible say about that? Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-14, Romans 10:14-17, and 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

What is Our Biggest Need?

Mennonites believe that our sin separates us from God. But they do not take that very seriously. They will sometimes say that we didn't inherit sin and guilt from Adam. Read Romans 5:12 to see what the Bible says.

Can We Help Ourselves?

Mennonites believe that people have some ability to do good and please God. Read Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:10-12.

What Does "Salvation" Mean?

Mennonites and Lutherans don't agree very much on what salvation means. Lutherans (and the Bible) emphasize that we are sinful and guilty. We need a Savior who will forgive our sins and take us to heaven, His free gift. Remember, Mennonites say we are sinful, but they don't emphasize that very much. Mennonites emphasize that we should have a good holy life and follow Christ's commandments.

We emphasize faith. Believe in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. Then we can live a good life to thank God for His gift. Mennonites say the opposite. Mennonites say we should repent of our sins and change our life. Then we are good believers. What does John 3:16 emphasize?

Some Mennonites will say that Jesus' main work was done before He died. We say our salvation happened when Jesus died and rose again, because that is when Jesus paid to forgive our sins. Mennonites will sometimes say that Jesus' life example and teachings were more important than His death and resurrection. They say His death and resurrection only proved that His life and teachings were correct.

What Will Happen When We Die?

Mennonites and Lutherans agree that every person who belongs to Jesus Christ will go to heaven when they die. People who don't belong to Jesus go to hell. We mainly disagree on how a person "belongs" to Jesus. We say through faith in Jesus, Mennonites say you belong when you repent and follow Jesus' commands.

Do Mennonites Have Sacraments?

Mennonites think sacraments mean nothing, except to obey Jesus' command. They say baptism is only something you do to show you are now a Christian. They have the Lord's Supper only once or twice a year, only to follow Christ's command. They do not believe God gives any forgiveness or other gifts through them. Mennonites also have foot-washing ceremonies once a year, where they wash each other's feet.

What Do Mennonites Think About Church?

Mennonites believe the church is all true Christians, called out of the world. This is how most people recognize Mennonites. They say a true Christian church is a church with no obvious sinners. So members must try hard to live a good Christian life. If a person is guilty of a major sin, they are removed from the church. Members will not talk, eat, or even look at that person. They base that on 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. Some churches are more strict than others. Some strict churches, like the Amish, try to completely leave society. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. They think that means they should not have any kind of connection or business with people who don't belong to their church.

Anything Else About Them?

Lutherans are concerned about keeping the right teaching. Mennonites are concerned about living the right kind of life. We discuss and argue about different teachings. Mennonites (especially the strict ones) will discuss and argue about what kind of clothes are okay, if buttons are okay, and what kind of hat you should wear.

What Do Lutherans Say?

Mennonites are peaceful, honest, hardworking people. They normally have good reputations and strong families. But they need Jesus and His death and resurrection to be the foundation for their lives. They should trust Christ, not their own works.