

Mennonite Member Profile 2006
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Executive Summary

Mennonite Member Profile 2006 is a study of members of Mennonite Church USA that follows two similar studies conducted in 1972 and 1989. The earlier profiles (Church Member Profile I and Church Member Profile II) were conducted by J. Howard Kauffman, Leland Harder, and Leo Driedger, and included five Anabaptist denominations. Mennonite Church USA is one of three denominations in the larger project called Church Member Profile 2006 conducted by the Young Center of Elizabethtown College. The other denominations are the Brethren in Christ and the Church of the Brethren. The Senior Project Director for the three denominational project is Donald B. Kraybill (Elizabethtown College, PA). Denominational directors are Conrad L. Kanagy (Mennonite Church USA; Elizabethtown College, PA), Carl D. Bowman (Church of the Brethren; Bridgewater College, VA), and Ron Burwell (Brethren in Christ; Messiah College, PA).

In the summer of 2005, one hundred and twenty-four Mennonite Church USA congregations were selected from the denominational database of 965. A scientific selection process insured that members of these congregations would be representative of all members in Mennonite Church USA. Using membership directories from participating congregations, members 18 years of age and older were randomly selected to receive a survey. This process yielded a database of 3,080 members and their addresses. Mennonite Member Profile 2006 was mailed on February 14. By early summer, 76% of respondents had returned a useable questionnaire for a total number of 2,216 surveys. While special samples of Racial/Ethnic members and pastors were also included, the following is a summary of findings only from the representative sample of 3,080 members.

Spiritual Journey

Eighty-one percent of Mennonites attend worship services weekly, though only 8% attend more than once a week. Fifty-three percent of members attend Sunday School every week.

Forty-four percent of members say that their religious beliefs are “the most important thing in my life.” Eighty-six percent of members believe that God has “a special plan” for their lives.

The mean age at baptism for Mennonites is 14 years, and 23% of members were baptized in a church that was not Mennonite. Thirty percent of Mennonites were at one time or another a member of an “other than Mennonite” congregation, and 26% grew up in families where neither parent was Mennonite.

Ninety-eight percent of Mennonites acknowledge accepting “Christ as Savior and Lord,” with 49% recalling a specific moment of acceptance and another 49% saying that it happened gradually. Seventy-eight percent of Mennonites describe themselves as “born-again” Christians.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Eighty-seven percent of Mennonites “know that God really exists” and have “no doubts about it.” Less than two percent of members do not believe in a personal God or are unsure whether they can know if God exists.

When asked about Jesus, 69% of respondents believe that “Jesus is the only way to God and those without faith in Jesus will not be saved.” Another 24% believe that Jesus is the “clearest revelation of God, but that God may save people who don’t know Jesus.”

For the vast majority of members (85%), Jesus died “to complete God’s plan of salvation.” Another 4% believe that Jesus died to satisfy God’s anger, and 9% that Jesus died “to show the power of nonviolent love.” Ninety-two percent believe that Jesus was born of a virgin; 94% that Jesus physically rose from the dead, and 83% that Jesus will physically return to earth.

Ninety-five percent of Mennonites believe there is “life after death.” Seventy-eight percent believe there is a “real hell where some people are eternally punished” but 90% that there is “a real heaven where some people are eternally rewarded.”

When asked about the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as healing, prophesying, and speaking in tongues, 61% of respondents accept these as “genuine gifts of God’s Spirit to some Christians,” while 19% believe these gifts are more “human emotion” than God’s Spirit.

Ninety-three percent of Mennonites believe the Bible is God’s Word, though only 26% that it is to be “taken literally, word for word” and 57% that it is inspired but “not everything in it should be taken literally.”

When Mennonites were asked to identify the two religious words that “best described” them, two-thirds chose “Mennonite” or “Anabaptist.” The remaining one-third identified “spiritual,” “evangelical,” “charismatic” and “Pentecostal” among others.

Seventy-five percent of members pray daily and 32% read the Bible daily. Thirty-eight percent speak about their faith to people outside their church several times a month or more and 7% invite non-Christians to their church at the same rate.

Pastoral Leadership

Eighty-six percent of members want their pastor to have some seminary training while 84% want their pastor to emphasize Mennonite beliefs. Sixty-seven percent agree that

women should be ordained for pastoral ministry. When asked to check the highest priorities for pastors, members most often affirmed preaching sermons (46%) and providing pastoral counseling and care (32%) as the top priorities. Sixty-four percent of members have no preference as to whether their pastor is called from within their congregation or from without. Fifty-eight percent prefer a man as pastor. Forty percent have no preference and 2% prefer a woman.

Congregational Life

When given a list of worship preferences, the highest percent of members (38%) were “very positive” about hymns with four-part harmony. Twenty-five percent were very positive about singing without instruments while another 25% were very positive about contemporary praise songs. Twenty-four percent equally affirmed the sharing of personal faith stories, 19% of organ music, 18% of altar calls, 17% of electric guitars and drums. The vast majority (73%) of members feel negatively about references to God as “Mother or She.”

Family Life and Background

Fifty-six percent of the sample was female. Ninety-one percent were white and only 7% were born outside of the U.S. Seventy-one percent were of Swiss/German origins and 13% of Dutch/Russian. The median age of Mennonites is 54 years, with 7% of members under the age of 25, 25% between 25-45, 39% between 46-65, and 42% over the age of 66 years.

Twelve percent of Mennonites live on a farm today, while 10% live in large cities (250,000 or more residents). Thirty-one percent of members have lived in the same community for 20 or more years, and 21% have lived outside of the U.S. for at least two months.

Ten percent of Mennonites have been divorced, and 78% are currently married. Eleven percent of members are single, 2% are divorced, and 7% are widowed. Thirty-nine percent of members are married to spouses who did not grow up in a Mennonite congregation. Seventy-two percent of respondents who are married say that they are “very happy” in their marriage, and another 19% who are “somewhat happy.” Eighty percent agree that “in a marriage, the woman’s career should be as important as the man’s” and 72% that “child rearing and homemaking duties should not prevent a woman from pursuing a career or other employment.”

Forty-four percent of respondents are employed full-time, 11% part-time, and 2% are unemployed. Seven percent are “home makers,” 3% are students, and 29% are retired. Forty-one percent of members work in managerial and professional occupations, 27% in technical, sales and administrative support, 8% in a service occupation, 8% in farming, and 16% in precision production, fabrication, and as laborers. Thirty-eight percent of Mennonites have a four year college degree.

The Larger Church

When asked about their involvements in the larger church, 17% served in voluntary service, 7% in an overseas assignment, 6% with Mennonite Central Committee, and 16% on a Mennonite Disaster Service project. Twenty-four percent of Mennonites have attended an adult assembly and 9% have served as a delegate. Seventy-four percent attended a Mennonite Relief Sale and 14% a Mennonite World Conference.

When asked about their denominational commitments, 30% said it is very important that their local congregation be part of Mennonite Church USA. Fifty-eight percent indicated “very strong” commitment to their local congregation, 34% to their denomination, and 12% to their area conference. Only 8% completely agree that “Mennonite teachings more accurately reflect the Word of God than the teachings of any other denomination.”

Faith and Social Issues

Twenty-eight percent of members believe it is “very important” that “leaders and staff or church-related agencies reflect the Racial/Ethnic diversity across Mennonite congregations, while 28% believe it is “very important” that “church leaders discuss and address issues of race and racism.” Seventy-eight percent believe that immigration is either “more good than bad” or a “very good thing.”

Fifty-four percent of members believe the U.S. government is spending too little to protect the environment. Sixty-one percent do not think a “person with an incurable disease has the right to end his or her own life.” Seventy-eight percent of Mennonites consider themselves “pro-life,” and 69% do not believe that it should be possible for a woman “to obtain a legal abortion if she does not want a baby.”

Faith and Mission

Nearly one-fifth of members say they are not familiar with Mennonite Mission Network. One-third believe the work of MMN is “very important” while just over one-third of others believe it is “fairly important.” Members consistently want to see evangelism and social ministry held together in mission work and nearly everyone is supportive of Mennonite mission efforts.

When given a list of eight priorities for Mennonite mission agencies, “global evangelism and church planting” is the highest with “peacemaking and reconciliation” second. Three other priorities cluster closely behind: providing opportunities for voluntary service, community and economic development, and supporting congregations in the United States. The lowest priority is “witness through mass media.”

When asked to indicate the three (of six) most important activities of Mennonite Church USA, members indicated that the most important activity is “sharing God’s love in word and deed” followed by “working for peace and justice.” The remaining four activities clustered closely together, with little difference among them.

While Mennonites support the mission work of the larger church, there is less evidence that they are willing to engage in evangelism and outreach at home and in their local communities. Few are willing to move in order to help plant a church and more than one-fifth have no interest in church planting. Few are actively engaged in evangelism and outreach in their local communities.

Faith and the Larger World

Seventy-three percent of Mennonites feel some level of conflict between their Mennonite beliefs and practices and those of the larger society. Only 2% believe that Christians should completely avoid government and politics, and are overwhelmingly supportive of voting and Mennonites running for public office. One-half of Mennonites identify as Republican, 22% as Democrat, and 15% as Independents. Two-third of those who voted in the 2004 election voted for George W. Bush.

Fifty-six percent of members believe that is “all right for Christians to be in non-combatant service in the armed forces.” Twenty-one percent would choose some form of military service if faced with a draft, and another 10% are not sure what they would do. Still, 93% of Mennonites agree that “peacemaking is a central theme of the Gospel.”

Twenty-nine percent of Mennonites support the death penalty, 43% are comfortable with a Christian filing a lawsuit, and 46% with a Christian swearing an oath in court.

Nearly one-half of Mennonites believe that America is a Christian nation, with two-thirds believing it is okay to pledge allegiance to the flag, and 35% that it is all right to display an American flag inside a Mennonite church. Twenty-four percent of members believe that the U.S. did the right thing in going to war against Iraq.

When asked about the important issues facing our society and around the world, members were asked to check the three of most concern to them from a list of 23. At the top was the erosion of family values (42%) followed by child abuse (30%), poverty (27%) abortion (23%), war (23%), and hunger (21%). Lowest on the list were gun control (2%), global warming (3%), and secular humanism (4%).

Stewardship and Lifestyle

Sixty-one percent of Mennonites give 10% or more of their household income to church and charitable causes. Forty-one percent say their giving to their local congregation has increased over the past two years and 22% say their giving to Mennonite related agencies has increased during the same time period.

Thirty-one percent of Mennonites read *The Mennonite* on a regular basis and 26% *The Mennonite Weekly Review*. Seventy-three percent of members have an internet connection in their home.

Summary and Reflections

Since the first member profile of Mennonites in the U.S. in 1972, members have become more assimilated into the larger society—more educated, more professional, and less rural. These changes have also affected member beliefs and attitudes. One example of this affect is the greater political engagement of Mennonites.

In addition, Mennonites on average have aged since 1972, with fewer members in childbearing age today than ever before. The proportion of Mennonites in childbearing age is lower today than for both mainline and evangelical Protestants.

More Mennonites today come from other than Mennonite religious traditions than in 1972. These members, however, are less committed to an Anabaptist identity than “cradle” (one or more parents Mennonite) Mennonites.

Sunday morning worship has become the primary connection for most members with their congregations, with fewer attending Sunday School and Sunday evening services. This shift poses a challenge for pastors and congregations who wish to influence members who are less engaged in church and increasingly more assimilated in the broader culture.

Mennonite Church USA includes more Racial/Ethnic members today than ever before. Over the past five years, one out of four new members was Racial/Ethnic compared to just 6% of persons who were Racial/Ethnic and became members in previous years. Racial/Ethnic members are more urban than other Mennonites, and offer a model for how to be “Anabaptist in the city”—something that few Mennonites in North America have experienced. The younger age of Racial/Ethnic members offers vitality to an aging denomination.

The findings of Mennonite Member Profile 2006 reveal a church that has changed substantially since 1972 in demographics, beliefs, and practices. These changes can be both opportunities as well as threats to a denomination that has fewer members today than it did in 1972 (General Conference Mennonite Church and “Old” Mennonite Church combined). With these changes as its reality, becoming a missional church is more critical today than ever before.