

reunion

Mennonite Church USA— CONFRONTING A LANDSCAPE OF CHANGE

By Conrad L. Kanagy

CONSIDER THIS

By Joseph Yoder

It's possible that in my lifetime I will see the time when there are more Amish than Mennonites in the United States. In fact, I think it is a very real possibility. Consider that in 2007 the Amish population was 218,025 (conservative figure that includes members and children) while the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ numbered 368,280 (members) in 2006. My assumption is made on statistics that show the Amish double about every 20 years and 90 percent of their youth join the church. Consider that in the Mennonite church today only 30% are in the age group of 18 to 45. What Conrad Kanagy's findings suggest is that the Mennonite church is aging and in danger of dying out. This change is more extreme for Mennonites than even for mainline Protestant denominations.

I'm suggesting that John Roth, Goshen College professor, had it right when he said, *"Never before have Mennonites enjoyed such credibility and support from other denominations. In ecumenical circles, Anabaptism is the darling child. People express interest in and acceptance of traditional Mennonite tenets such as peace and service. Even the Emergent church movement,"* he predicted, *"will one day start looking to the Mennonites for authenticity and grounding."*

"But while other Christians are embracing core Mennonite theology, MC USA members are turning away from their

...Continued on page 2

What does it mean to be a Mennonite in the 21st century? How have perceptions of Anabaptist identity changed over time? The frequency with which these questions arise among Mennonites suggests anxiety and uncertainty about possible responses. The transformation of two Mennonite denominations into one, the continued assimilation of Mennonites in the broader American culture, important regional differences among Mennonites, and the growth of Racial/Ethnic congregations challenge efforts to provide answers to these questions.

In 1972 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder launched Church Member Profile I, a comprehensive survey of five Anabaptist denominations in North America. Joined by Leo Driedger, they conducted a follow-up study in 1989. In 2006, Donald B. Kraybill of the Young Center of Elizabethtown College (Pa.) led a three-person team that conducted a profile of three denominations—Mennonite Church USA, the Church of the Brethren and the Brethren in Christ. The current essay reports initial findings from the study of Mennonite Church USA.

Mennonite Identity

When Mennonites in 2006 were asked to identify the two religious words that "best described" them, two-thirds chose "Mennonite" or "Anabaptist." Eighty-four percent of pastors chose these two words as did 41% of Racial/Ethnic members.

Most Loyal to Their Congregation

Like other Americans, Mennonites are more committed to their congregation than to their denomination or area conference. Thirty-four percent of Mennonite members said they are "very strongly" committed to the denomination and 12% to their area conference. In comparison, 58% are "very strongly" committed to their local congregation.

At the same time, more members today (48%) than in 1972 (25%) say they will always want to remain a member of their denomination. This level of loyalty is slightly lower than for Conservative Protestants (52%) in the U.S. but higher than among Mainline Protestants (37%).

More New Members

A major shift among Mennonites over the past three decades has been the increase in members from other denominations. The percent of "non-cradle" Mennonites—neither parent being Mennonite—has risen since 1972 from 17% to 26% and the percent who married a spouse from another denomination has risen from 25% to 39% in that same period.

Aging Membership

The average age of Mennonites today is 54 years, five years older than in 1989. More important, however, is the shifting age distribution of Mennonites. In 1972, 54% of Mennonites were between 18 and 45 years of age—within what demographers refer to as childbearing age. This number declined to 45% in 1989 and is only 30% today. This **change** has been more extreme for Mennonites than even for Mainline Protestant denominations, which a recent study described as "literally dying out" because of similar changes in their age distribution. Among Mainline Protestant

...Continued on page 2

LANDSCAPE OF CHANGE ...cont. from page 1

denominations, 42% of members are under 45 years of age compared to 53% of Conservative Protestants.

Regional Differences

Mennonites differ in important ways depending on where they live. For example:

- Mennonites in the West are more likely to have come from other denominations—38% baptized in an “other than Mennonite” congregation compared to 23% in the East and South, and 22% in the Midwest.
- Mennonites in the Midwest are most likely to be “cradle” Mennonites, with 72% with parents who were both Mennonite.
- Mennonites in the South are less mobile than other Mennonites, with 40% living in the same community for 30 years or more.
- Mennonites in the East are most rural—only 13% live in cities of 50,000 or more residents compared to 71% of Westerners.

Growth among Racial/Ethnic Congregations

The growth of Racial/Ethnic congregations is changing the face of Mennonite Church USA. The term Racial/Ethnic is a self-designation by Mennonite Church USA groups with members that include those who are African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian and “other than Anglo.” In the past five years, 25% of the denomination’s new members have been Racial/Ethnic compared to just 6% among those members who entered the denomination more than five years ago.

Increased Assimilation

In 1972, 36% of Mennonites lived on a farm compared to 12% today. While almost twice as many Mennonites reside in large cities (cities with 250,000 or more residents) today as in 1972, this number still accounts for less than 10% of all Mennonites.

In their work, more Mennonites hold business and professional occupations compared with three decades ago—41% today and 23% in 1972. And twice as many Mennonites have college degrees today (38%) as in 1972 (19%).

Greater Political Identification

In 1972, 37% of Mennonites claimed no political identity compared to only 11% today. Increases have occurred for both Republicans and Democrats. In 1972, 42% of Mennonites identified themselves as Republicans while 50% did so in 2006. During that same period Democrats nearly doubled from 12% to 22%. But in the last presidential election, two-thirds of Mennonites who voted did so for George W. Bush.

Changing Church Attendance

While the percent of Mennonites who regularly attend church has remained about the same since 1972, church attendance for Mennonites has become largely a “once a week” event, with the percent who attend more than once a week dropping from 43% in 1972 to 8% today. In addition, the proportion who attend Sunday school has declined from 71% in 1972 to 53% today.

Conclusion

These early findings of Mennonite Member Profile 2006 have important implications for Mennonite Identity as well as the future of Mennonite Church USA. Among these implications are both challenges and opportunities:

- The growth of members from other than Mennonite backgrounds is good news for a denomination interested in becoming more missional—calling all people to a primary allegiance to Jesus Christ. Integrating these members into the denomination remains a challenge, however, since they are more ambivalent about an Anabaptist identity than are other members.
- The shift in age among Mennonites is a critical issue for the denomination. Without a major influx of younger persons, questions of Anabaptist identity will take a backseat to the question of mere survival.
- The findings about Racial/Ethnic members are among the most encouraging of this study. Not only are these members younger on average, they also bring a rich spiritual diversity to Mennonite Church USA.
- The shift to Sunday morning worship as the only religious service of the week along with the decline in Sunday school attendance, pose challenges for pastors and congregations seeking to influence members who are less engaged in church and increasingly more assimilated in the broader culture.
- The forces of modern and postmodern culture—professionalism, education, individualism and suburbanization—continue to shape Mennonites who are more assimilated in the broader culture than ever before.
- The increased political identification of Mennonites threatens to polarize members around controversial issues.
- Regional differences make for rich diversity but also challenge churchwide discernment efforts.

Conrad L. Kanagy, Ph.D is Mennonite Member Profile 2006 Director, Associate professor of Sociology at Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pa., and an ordained minister in Lancaster Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

This article first appeared in the Feb. 6, 2007 issue of *The Mennonite*. Reprinted with permission.

CONSIDER THIS ...cont. from page 1

historic beliefs. Many seem to view Mennonite beliefs and traditions as barriers to the unchurched—and so Mennonite congregations start to become more generically Christian.

“Mennonites have been given a gift and are stewards of a distinctive theology and practice that other denominations now appreciate.” (The Mennonite Weekly, Nov. 26, 2007)

At Menno-Hof we have discovered Roth’s critique to be correct. We as Anabaptists, have much to offer to the world, other religions and Christians. This is not the time to run away from who we are, but to affirm those parts of our beliefs and traditions that speak to hope and life in Christ.

2008 MEMBERSHIPS

Menno-Hof memberships are renewed annually October 1 and entitle you to free admission, *REUNION* and 15% discount on book shop and Ten Thousand Villages purchases. We greatly value your support for this ministry.

Bakalagos, Tim & Nancy
Bauman, Ruth
Beasley, Jerry & Ruth
Bender, Robert L.
Berkey, Maurice
Birkey, Dee
Birky, Luke & Verna
Bloch, Mr. & Mrs. Walter
Bontrager Waite, Phil & Beth
Bontrager, Alvin & Mary
Bontrager, Ellis & Ruby
Bontrager, Mark & Clara
Bontrager, Sam & Esther
Bontrager, Warren & Annabelle
Bontrager, Wilbur L. & Sarah
Bontreger, Harold
Boone, Aretas
Breckbill, Willis & Ina
Brenneman, Virgil
Brubacher, Walter M.
Burkholder, John R. & Susan
Byler, Henry & Clara
Cerven, Nome
Chiovare, Jane
Christner, John
Chupp, Harvey & Carolyn
Chupp, Larry & Dorothy
Clemenson, Barbara
Cobb, Ruth E.
Conat, Paige Ann
Cook, Leon & Wendy
Cotter, J.D. & Rosemary
Devine, Billie J.
Diener, Carrie Yoder
Dubovoy, Hugo
Duerksen, Belle
Element Masters, The
Farmwald, Leon & Esther
Field, William E.
Friesen, Le Roy V.
Fry, Paul & Rosemary
Funk, Virgil & Joyce
Geiser, Leonard & Linea
Gering, William & Lucille
Gilliam, Dorothy L.
Glenn, Jesse D.
Glick, Maggie
Goering, Gene & Janet
Goering, Paul & Wilda
Graber, Adeline
Greaser, Lawrence H.
Guth, Caryl & Ron
Haarer, Paul W.
Hawkins, Dave & Cindy
Heritage Historical Library
Herschberger, Edith
Herschberger, Virgil & Margaret
Hochstetler, Daniel & Arie
Hochstetler Dan A.
Hochstetler, Lonnie & Shirley
Horst, Cranson
Horst, Laurence M.
Hostetler, Frank & June
Jones, Winford & Ulonda
Kauffman, Maxine
Kauffmann, Dottie
Kauffmann, Ivan & Lola
Kenagy, Ben & June
Kinsey, Claude Jr. & Carol
Klassen, Henry & Betty
Klaus, Raymond
Kreider, Alan & Eleanor
Lambright, Goldie
Lambright, LaVern O. & Esther
Lawrence, Robert R.
Lehman, Dr. L.L.
Lehman, Michael Todd
Licht, Tim & Carolyn
Long, Dave & Charlotte
Liechty, Lynn
Maki, Carol & Arnold
Marner, Clair & Juanita
Martin, Allen & Ruth
Martin, Richard
Maust, Norman & Wilmetta
Mayercheck, Dave
McKee, Elaine
Metzler, Everett G.
Miller, Calvin & Darlene
Miller, Dennis & Vert
Miller, Elmer J.
Miller, Floyd R.
Miller, James & Barbara
Miller, John O.
Miller, Lydia A.
Miller, Norman & Carolyn
Miller, Paul & Ruth
Miller, Truman & Joyce
Miller, Vernon J. & Barbara
Miller, Wayne & Leabell
Mishler, Marc A. & Diana
Mishler, Maurice
Mishler, Paul & Evelyn
Morris, Pastor Clyde E.
Mortenson, Al
Otto, Eli
Pass, Annie
Pavloff, Dan & Deborah
Preheim, John & JoAnn
Ramer, Titus & Anna Marie
Regier, Mark & Marlene Kroeker
Rheinheimer, Floyd & Irene
Richards, E. Joe & Emma
Richter, Karleen
Riegsecker, Dale & Shirley

Riegsecker, Gene & Judy
Riegsecker, Glen & Jeanne
Riegsecker, Vernon & Ida
Robertson Zabik, Janie
Ropp, Leland J.
Roth, Willard & Alice
Ryan, Virginia
Schmidt, Kenneth & Phyllis
Schrock, Truman
Schrock, Wayne & Norma
Short, Marvin
Showalter, Conrad & Lynette
Slabaugh, Daniel & Ethel
Slabaugh, Troy
Smak, Eugene & Rune
Smith, Craig C.
Stankoven, Gary & Sharon
Stauffer, Don & Elizabeth
Stevens, Jon & Elaine
Stomper, Richard
Stutzman, Donald E.
Sutter, Earl & Margaret
Swartzendruber, Edward & Mary
Swope, Bethany & Marshall King
Thackston, B.J.
Thomas, Douglas
Tompkins, Kristine
Troyer, Floyd & Joyce
Troyer, Gladys
Troyer, Ray
Troyer, Sam
Unzicker, Carl & Arleta
Unternahrer, Dan & Annabelle
Voigt, William
Vonder Kuhlen, Sandra L.
Washington, Mr. & Mrs.
Booker T.
Weaver, Lisa & Jon Dyck
Weldy, Miriam
Williams, Angela M.
Wolheter, Julie
Wright, Vanessa
Wyse, Aldine
Wyse, Ron & Susan
Yoder, Doris
Yoder, Esther E.
Yoder, E. Fern
Yoder, Galen & Esther
Yoder, Harry & Mary Ellen
Yoder, Joseph & Jan
Yoder, Michael J. & Ruth Miller-Yoder
Yoder, Mary Ellen
Yoder, Robert & Katherine
Yoder, Roger & Marolyn
Zehr, Doug & Miriam

AMISH POPULATION GROWTH

There are 395 Amish settlements spread across twenty-seven states and the Canadian province of Ontario. In total, these settlements include approximately 1,600 church districts (congregations). Nearly two thirds (1,031 of 1,615) of the districts are found in three states: Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana. Since 2000, Wisconsin has had the largest number of new settlements, due to a surge of migrations from other states as far away as Pennsylvania.

Observers might expect a traditional group that rejects higher education, car ownership and the Internet to be on the wane. On the contrary, the Amish population doubles about every twenty years. The 200 church districts in 1951 grew to 1,615 by 2007.

Large families and strong retention rates propel the growth. On average, families have about seven children, but it's not unusual for them to have ten or more. Typically, 90 percent or more of the youth join the church. (A few members do leave after baptism; defection rates vary from community to community.) Although the Amish do not seek converts, outsiders may join if they comply with Amish guidelines. Several dozen outsiders have done so.

Reprinted with permission www2.etown.edu/amishstudies/Population_Growth.asp

WINTER VOLUNTEERS

Our new volunteer hosts, Carl and Arleta Unzicker from Calhan, Colorado are spending three months this winter at Menno-Hof. Their tasks include leading tours, relating to visitors and doing the winter in-depth housecleaning—a task of the long-term volunteers during January, February and March.

Carl and Arleta are retired teachers, having taught art and Spanish respectively for many years. Arleta also writes poetry and Carl is an accomplished horseman. We enjoy their wonderful sense of humor and their ability to interact with our visitors. They also enjoy spending time with a son and his family who live in the area.

You can now get the current issue of *Reunion* on line at www.mennohof.org. Also get our **Ponderings from the Hof**, (short meditations) and up-to-date happenings under **"What's Happening"** on our website. We welcome your response by email or regular mail.

DIRECTOR'S DESK

On May 2, 1988 Menno-Hof opened its doors to the general public. This May Menno-Hof will be twenty years old. That, in itself, is no small feat. It takes constant vigilance to keep telling our story in a viable way for our visitors to be able to hear the “good news of Jesus.” Understand that while many people come here to learn more of the Amish Mennonite story, they are at the same time learning the story of a historic people who were so radical in the 16th century that they were able to get themselves martyred.

For some of our visitors as they hear the story of this “radical third way,” (neither Catholic or Protestant) many of the ideas of the Anabaptists resonate with them. Ideas like:

- The separation of church and state
- Nonviolence
- Voluntary believer's baptism
- Radical discipleship
- Service

What a place like Menno-Hof can do is to share our story in non-threatening ways.

The challenge for a venue like this is to keep the story fresh and find new and exciting ways to keep retelling the story. For example, our Wall of Faces is getting a fresh look. The next time you visit all the pictures will be new. The next step is the addition of a flat screen TV that will show how Anabaptism has grown throughout the world. Today there are more Mennonites in Africa than in the USA and Canada combined. As sophisticated Mennonites begin to lose the historic values of radical Anabaptism the message is catching on in parts of the third world.

What will the next 20 years bring for Menno-Hof?

—Joseph Yoder

VISITOR COMMENTS

“I have been here before and noted how pictures have been updated as well as information. Changes are remarkable!”

“An extremely well presented and explained historical perspective—one of the best I've seen!”

Visitors:

January – December '07
24,892

May '88 – December '07
780,335

Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof. Direct questions or comments to Joseph Yoder, director, at jjyoder@mennohof.org

Menno-Hof Amish-Mennonite Visitors' Center

P.O. Box 701
510 S. Van Buren Street / S.R. 5
Shipshewana, IN 46565
Tele (260) 768-4117
Fax (260) 768-4118
E-mail: info@mennohof.org
Website: www.mennohof.org



MENNO-HOF

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

P.O. Box 701

Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

*See and Hear
the Amish-Mennonite Story*

NON-PROFIT ORG

U S POSTAGE

PAID

SHIPSHEWANA IN

46565

PERMIT NO 17