

Chapter 1:

Develop a Membership Snapshot of MC USA Constituents

This chapter captures the demographics of the MC USA membership who participated in the 2021 survey conducted by Springtide Research Institute. Exploring two main categories of demographics to build a full picture of the landscape of MC USA members, this chapter first examines basic demographics and then moves into demographic information unique to the Mennonite nature of MC USA. The first section covers everything from individual identity to geographic context. The second covers participants' origin stories with the Mennonite Church and how they remain engaged (or don't) in the present day. Note that throughout this chapter the same dimensions that Conrad Kanagy looked at in 2006 are mirrored to provide opportunities for meaningful comparisons of change over time.

Basic Demographics

General

Demographics are not enough to truly understand the experience of the MC USA member, but it is important to capture the picture of those who engaged in the research,

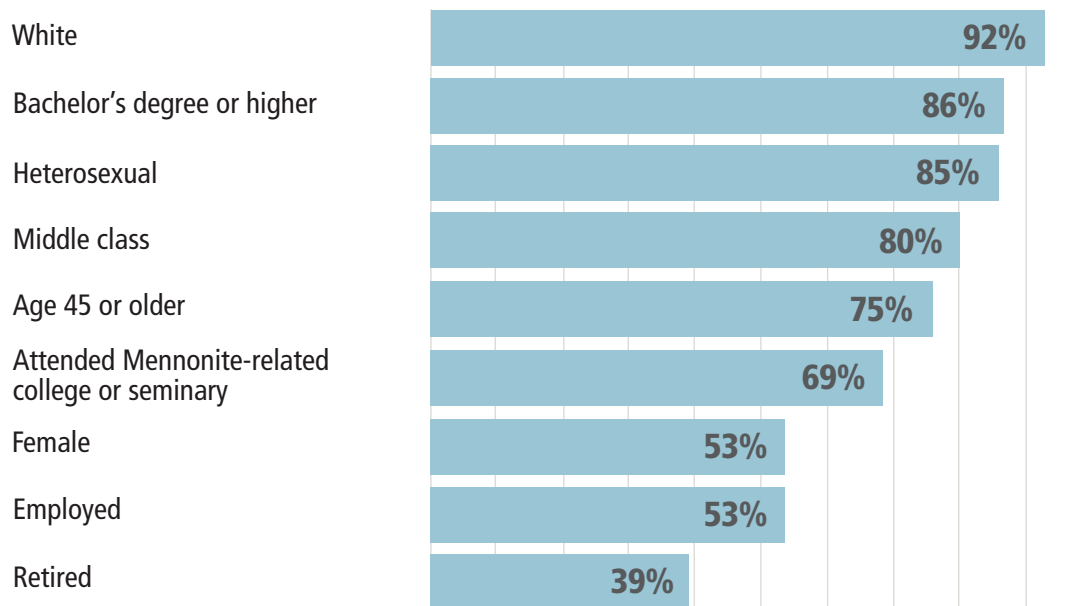
as it likely reflects those who are engaged in other aspects of “being Mennonite.”

The majority of members have children who are of adult age (64%), followed by elementary age (13%), adolescent age (9%), and preschool age (8%). While this may not be entirely representative of the MC USA population, it is likely a snapshot of those who are engaged, given they opted into the study.

MC USA members in this sample self-identify as white (92%), heterosexual (85%), 45 years of age and older (75%), and female (53%). In 2006, Kanagy indicated that 30% of MC USA members were under age 45. Today, one-quarter (25%) of members are under age 45. Participants typically have a bachelor's degree or higher (86%) and have attended a Mennonite-related college or seminary (69%). Most consider themselves middle class (80%) and have an annual income of at least \$50,000 (77%). Many MC USA members are either employed (53%) or retired (39%). The top occupational fields for MC USA members include retired (24%), other (21%), education (14%), and health care (8%).

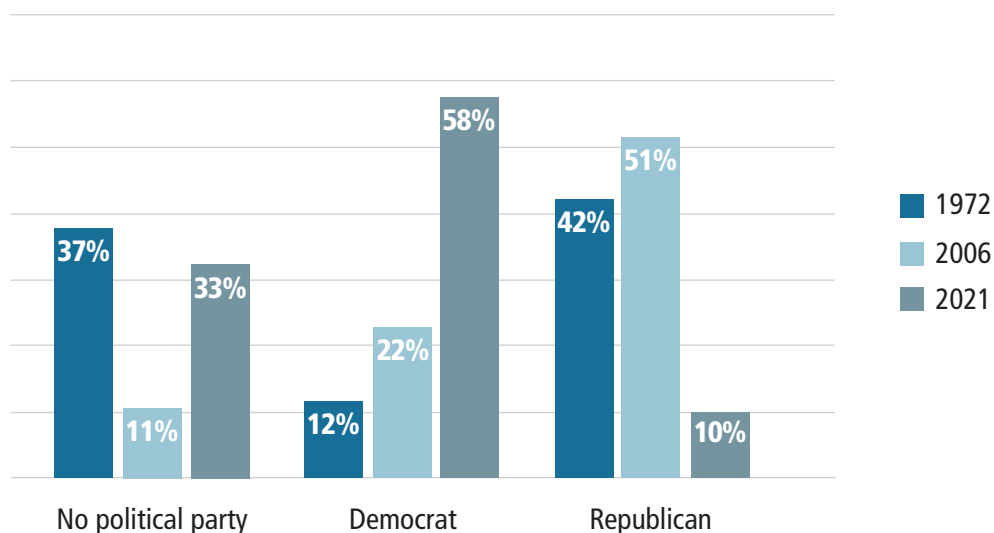


Snapshot of Survey Participants (Majority)



Members who participated in this study indicate they are happy and healthy. About 10% of MC USA members are currently living with a disability, and the majority of participants (88%) consider themselves to be in good or very good health. And, despite most members having a little bit (54%) or a fair amount (33%) of stress, almost all participants consider themselves moderately (55%) or very (42%) happy.

Political Party Affiliation of MC USA Members

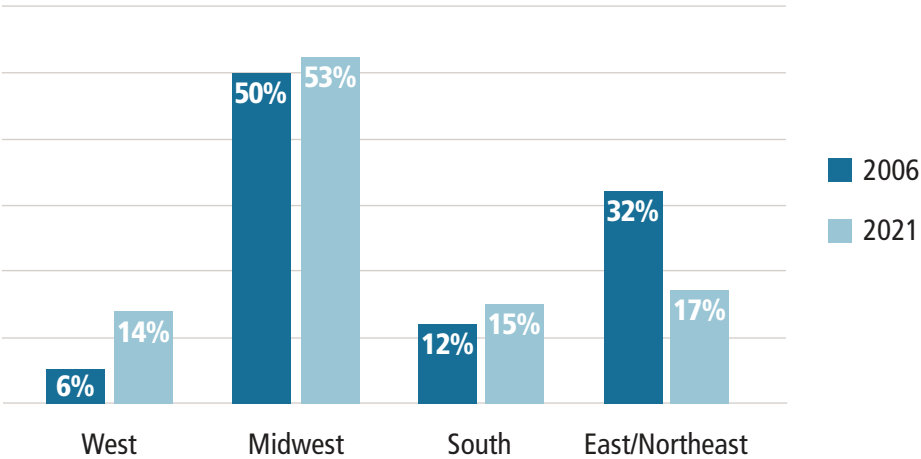


The percentage of MC USA members who identify as Democrat or no political party (including independent, other, none) has doubled since 2006. The percentage of members who identify as Republican has dropped significantly. Given that 79% of participants agree that contemporary issues and politics are important to discuss in congregations, understanding the directional trend of members’ political leaning is essential. However, despite their desire to be able to address issues and politics, 68% believe that politics detract from the core mission of following Jesus Christ. Most MC USA congregations (49%) have a theologically/socially diverse and/or liberal/progressive (49%) frame. However, about one-fifth (21%) of members indicate that their congregation still uses a conservative or traditional structure.

Location

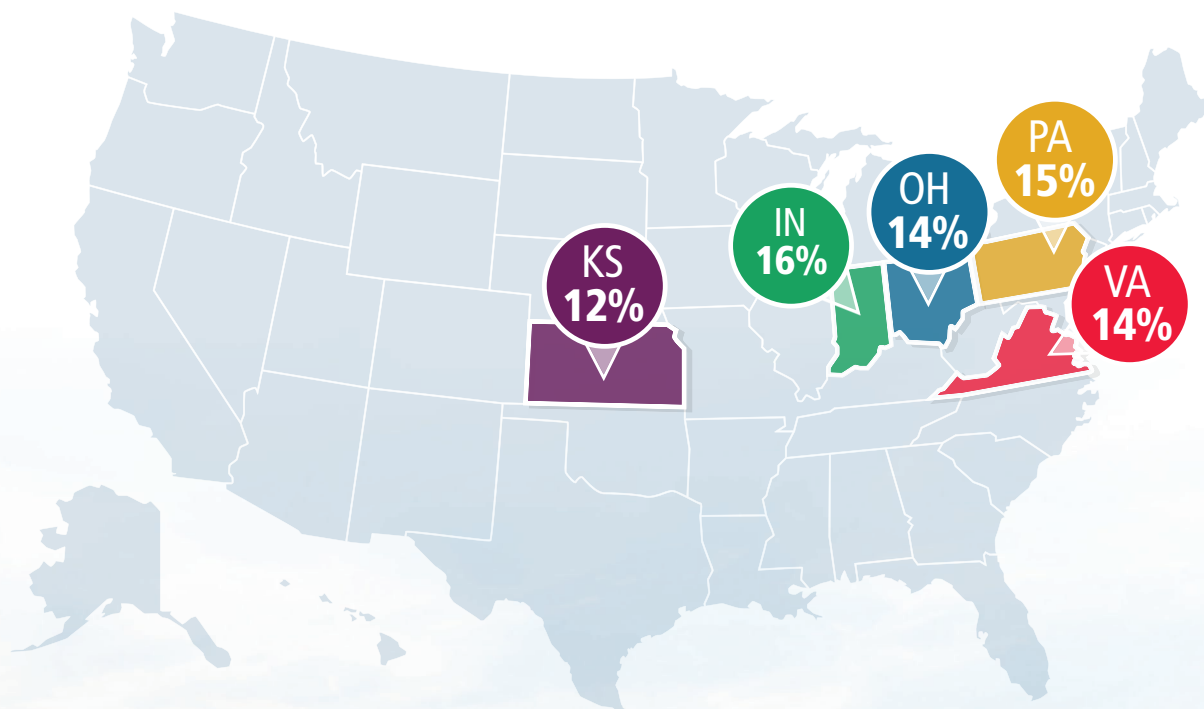
In the past 15 years, MC USA members have migrated westward. In 2006, only 6% of MC USA members resided in the West, while 32% resided in the East/Northeast. Today, 14% of members live in the West, while 17% live in the East/Northeast.

Regional Distribution of MC USA Members



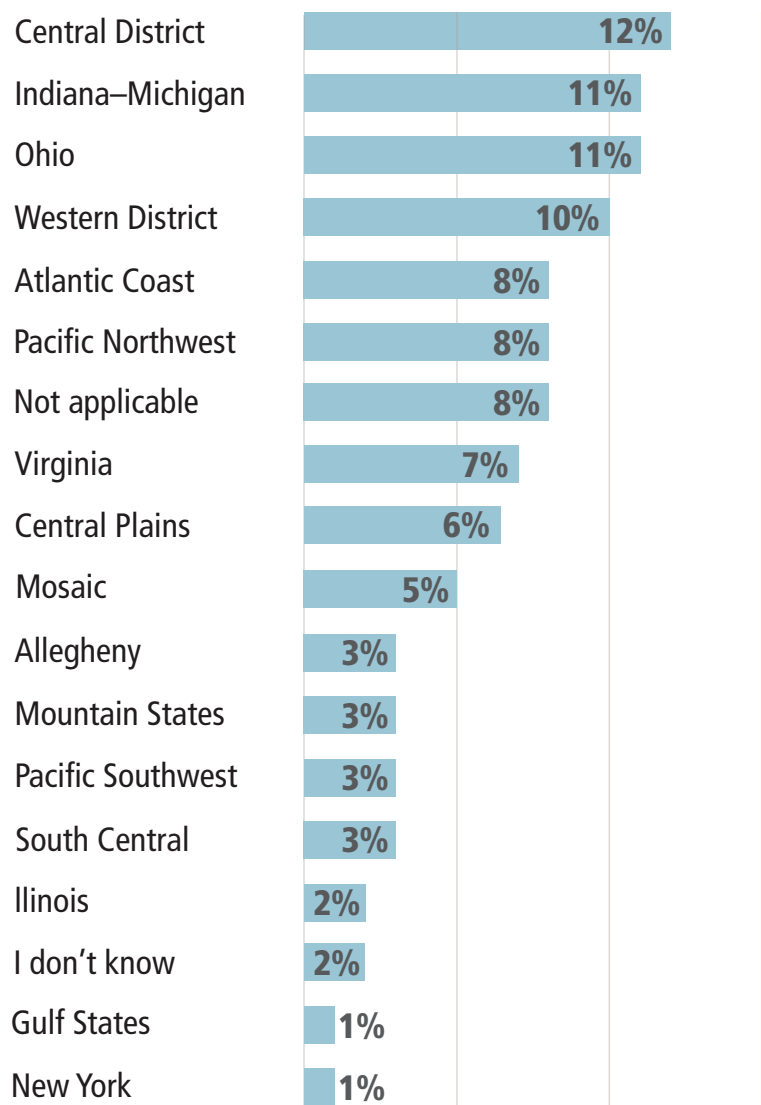
A closer look suggests that two-thirds of Mennonites in the US reside in 5 states, including Indiana (16%), Pennsylvania (15%), Ohio (14%), Kansas (12%), and Virginia (14%). Members, although concentrated in specific geographic locations, are somewhat evenly spread across dwelling types, with many members settling in small cities (25%), open country/farmland (24%), small towns (20%), large cities (18%), and medium cities (14%). Additionally, through a series of “check all that apply” questions, MC USA members describe the community surrounding their congregation as rural (38%), suburban (38%), and urban (35%). Most MC USA members attend a church that is within 5 miles (53%) or 6 to 10 miles (23%) of their home.

Top 5 States of MC USA Survey Participants



The area conferences that members' local congregations are a part of are as follows: Central District (12%), Indiana-Michigan (11%), Ohio (11%), Western District (10%), Atlantic Coast (8%), Pacific Northwest (8%), Virginia (7%), Central Plains (6%), Mosaic (5%), Allegheny (3%), Mountain States (3%), Pacific Southwest (3%), South Central (3%), Illinois (2%), New York (1%), and Gulf States (1%). It is important to note that 10% of participants could not answer this question either because it was not applicable (8%) or they did not know (2%).

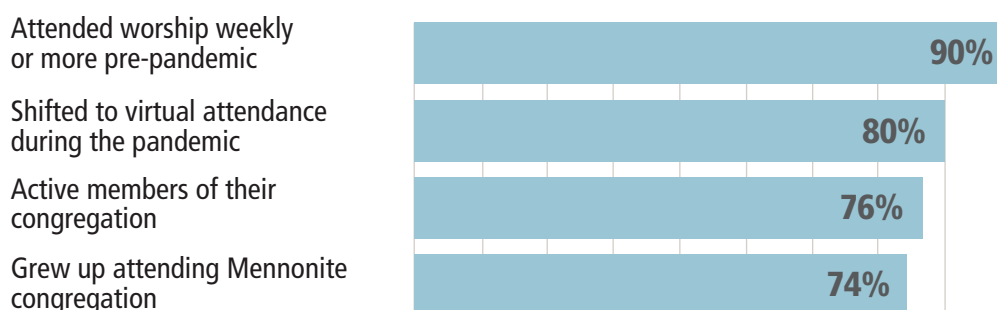
**Percentage of MC USA Survey
Participants by Local Congregation**



Mennonite-Specific Demographics

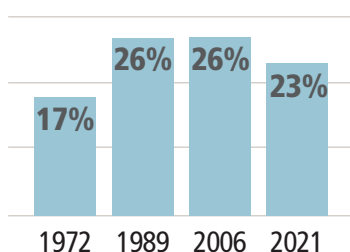
To foster a deeper understanding about how people came to engage with the Mennonite Church and how they continue to practice, participants in the interview portion of the Springtide study were invited to share their journey. These stories, alongside the survey data collected, formed a general picture of how MC USA members come to the church and how they engage.

Members' Attendance



The percentage of members who identify steady, lifelong ties to the Mennonite Church has remained relatively constant since 1989, but that percentage is currently under 25% of all members.

Percentage of Non-cradle Mennonites

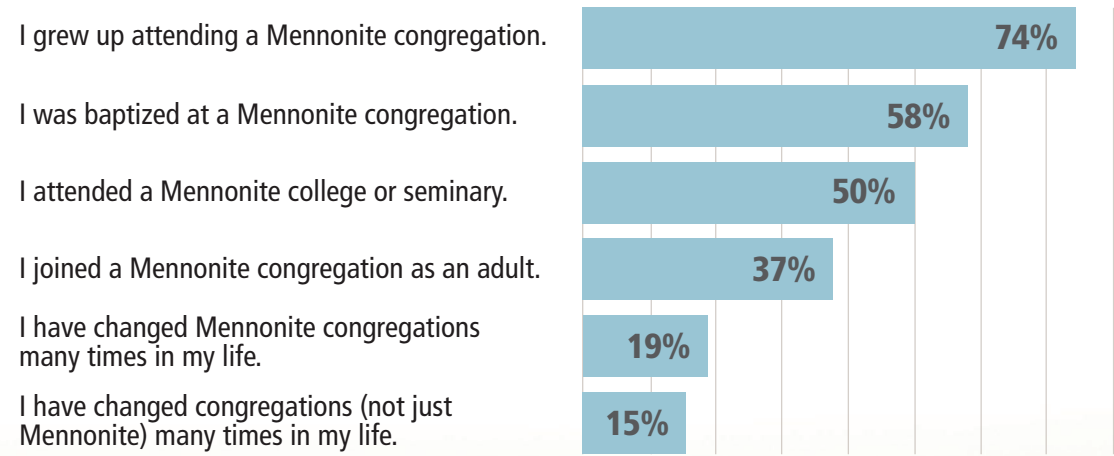


Current MC USA members have grown up with multiple connections to the Mennonite Church, and often these connections started in childhood and remain into adulthood. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of current members indicate that both parents were members of a Mennonite congregation, and 23% grew up with neither parent attending a Mennonite congregation.

Engagement: Commitment

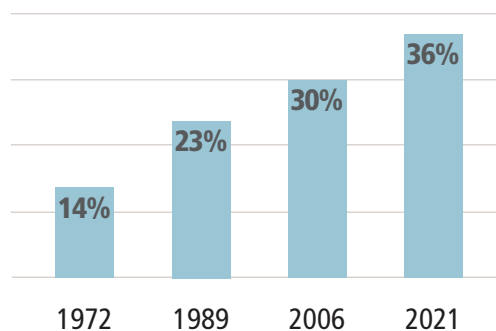
Of current members, 58% were baptized at a Mennonite congregation, and 50% have attended a Mennonite college or seminary. Most members have been following a Mennonite church for at least two decades—50% attending for over 40 years, and 27% attending for 21–40 years.

Connections to the Mennonite Church



MC USA members have a solid commitment to the Mennonite Church, but this does not stop them from trying out other denominations. The number of MC USA members that have been part of a non-Mennonite denomination has risen steadily over the years. In 1972, 14% of Mennonites had come from “other than Mennonite” denominations (Kanagy, 2006). Today, just over one-third (36%) of survey participants have been a member of a non-Mennonite congregation, and 15% have been a member of a non-Mennonite congregation many times.

**Members from
“other than Mennonite”**



Despite, or perhaps because of, their exploration of other communities and denominations, “cradle” Mennonites feel a deeper connection to the church after their experiences elsewhere. Several interview participants shared this phenomenon when asked about the nuance and dimensions of “being Mennonite.” The stories on the next three pages highlight the journey that many who were born into the faith share, in which their experience of being Mennonite moved from being unconscious to chosen. They embraced the faith as part of their identity after recognizing for themselves what being Mennonite means.



George shares that he left the insulated world he grew up in and interacted with a wide range of people. In doing so, he realized the value of what it meant to him to “be Mennonite”—not just in name alone.

“I think it took me going out of that bubble to develop a better sense of what it means to me to be a Mennonite. For me, that was going to college and seeing how other people live and how people do life, whether that was other Mennonites or other people in general. And so, just interacting with a broader group of people other than the bubble that I had grown up in. And I think through that, realizing that it wasn’t enough for me to just have a personal faith, a personal view on, you know, what God is to me, but I had to . . . say, what is our communal face? What does God look like for the people around me, for my community? I think it was very much this idea of shifting the focus from being inward-looking [to looking] outward at things. I think that really changed how I view my faith.” — George

Tiffany was not experiencing “being Mennonite” in the way she believed she should, so she explored other Mennonite organizations that were living out their commitments to peacekeeping in a more active and obvious way.

“I was raised in the ‘Brethren in Christ’ denomination, but I think I became kind of disaffected by that because what I understood of the denomination’s commitments to peacemaking, I was not seeing lived out or preached in my local congregation. And the more that I studied Jesus, his words and teachings, the more that it seemed like that was a central aspect of his message. So, I did some volunteer work with a Mennonite Central Committee, and I hung out with Mennonites there. I was like, ‘Hey, these are pretty cool people. And they’re putting into practice the things that they say they believe.’ I found that the underlying Anabaptist theology was what made me say, ‘Okay, this is really where I fit in terms of my theological inclinations.’ It seemed like a pretty natural move then to become part of MC USA.” — Tiffany

Ken speaks about how easy it is to take his knowledge about his faith for granted after being immersed in it for so long. He was encouraged by someone outside the faith to explore it in a deeper and different way. In doing so, he began to define it for himself and reconnect with what it means to “be Mennonite.”

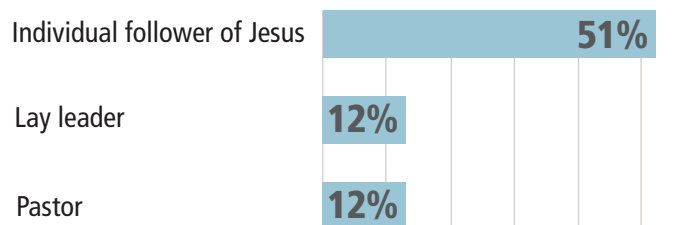
“I was born into it. I grew up in a Southeast Iowa, rural Mennonite, Amish community, and my parents took me to a Mennonite church from the day I was born. This is an important part of my story. When I graduated from high school, I ended up attending college at Drake University. . . . [A professor] said, ‘What do you know about your tradition?’ And I said, ‘Not a whole lot.’ I mean, it had been very experiential to this point. He said, ‘You’re not going to write about Roman Catholics. You’re going to write about Mennonites and go to the library and read this book on Anabaptism.’ And that began a journey for me, in which I truly, as a young adult, claimed the Mennonite faith or expression of Christianity as my own. So even though I was born into it, there was a point at which it became a conscious decision on my part to continue in it.” — Ken



Engagement: Participation

Participants predominantly identify as an individual follower of Jesus Christ (51%), without holding any additional main roles with the Mennonite Church. The other main roles include lay leader (12%), pastor (12%), and none (10%).

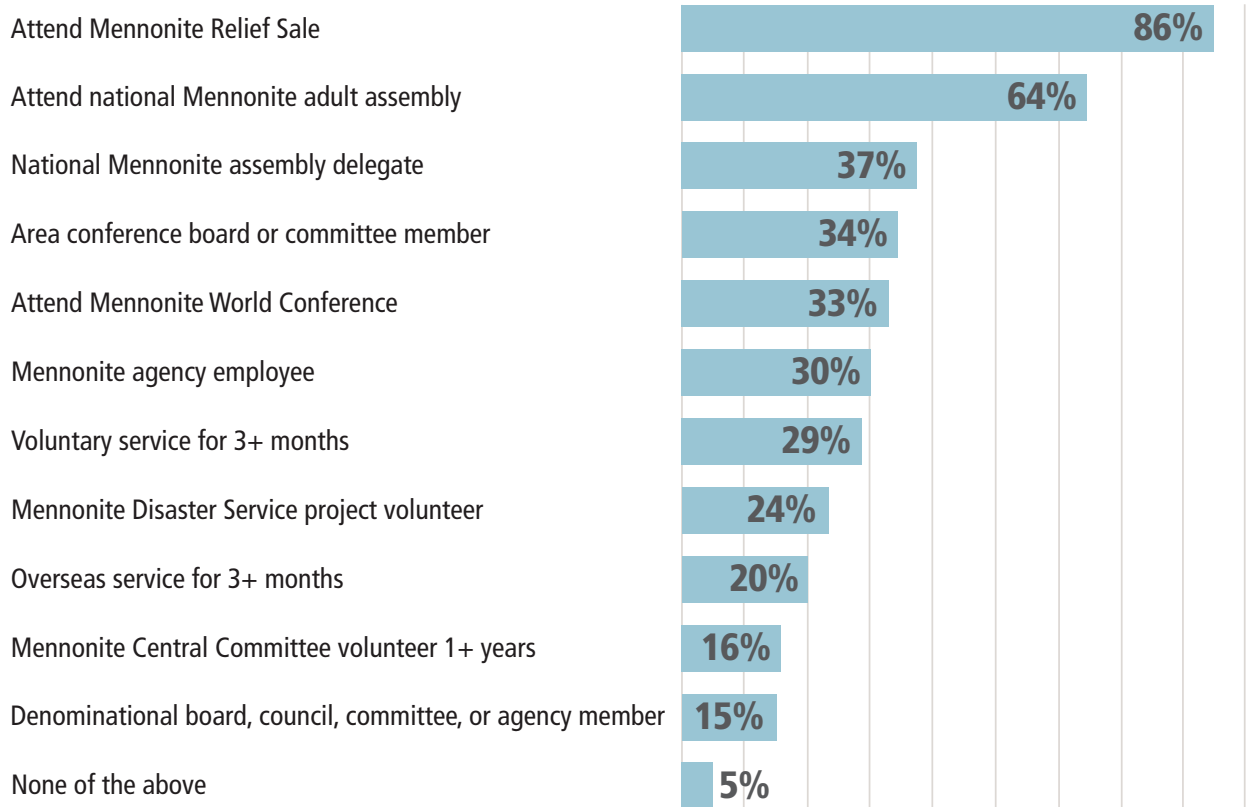
Roles within MC USA



The most common leadership role of members is volunteer (41%). This is followed by “other” leadership capacities (12%), full/part-time lead or solo pastor (8%), paid employee (7%), area-specific pastor (3%), bi-vocational pastor (3%), co-pastor (2%), and full/part-time associate pastor (2%).

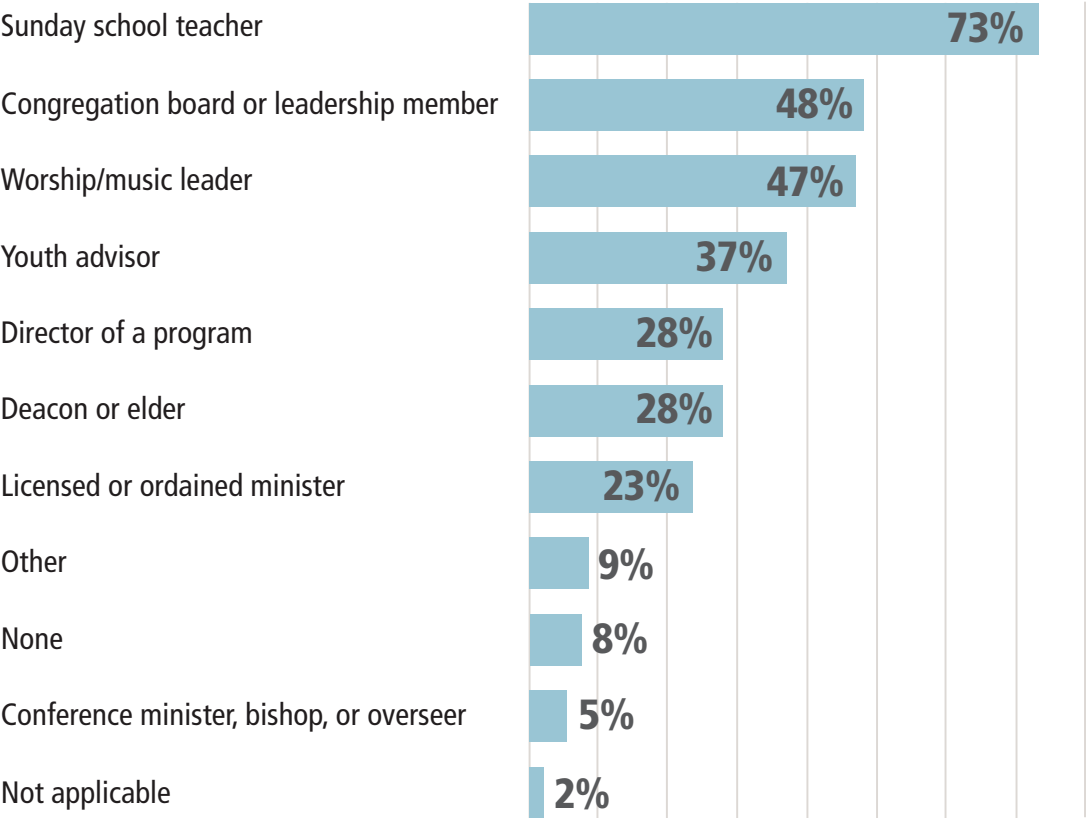
Most MC USA members participate in various organizational activities. Only 5% of members indicate they have not participated in any of the following denomination-associated activities. Most members (86%) have attended a Mennonite Relief Sale and a national Mennonite adult assembly (64%). Around one-third (37%) of participants have served as a delegate to a national Mennonite assembly, served on an area conference board or committee (34%), and attended Mennonite World Conference (33%). Over one-quarter (30%) of members have worked as an employee of a Mennonite agency, participated in voluntary service for three months or more (29%), and helped the Mennonite Disaster Service project for a week or more (24%).

Participation in MC USA Activities



Most members have held at least one position within a Mennonite congregation. The most common positions held by participants include Sunday school teacher (73%), congregation board or leadership member (48%), worship/music leader (47%), followed by youth advisor (37%), director of a program (28%), deacon or elder (28%), and licensed or ordained minister (23%). Less than one-tenth (8%) of survey participants indicate they have not held any position within a Mennonite congregation.

Positions MC USA Members Have Held within a Congregation

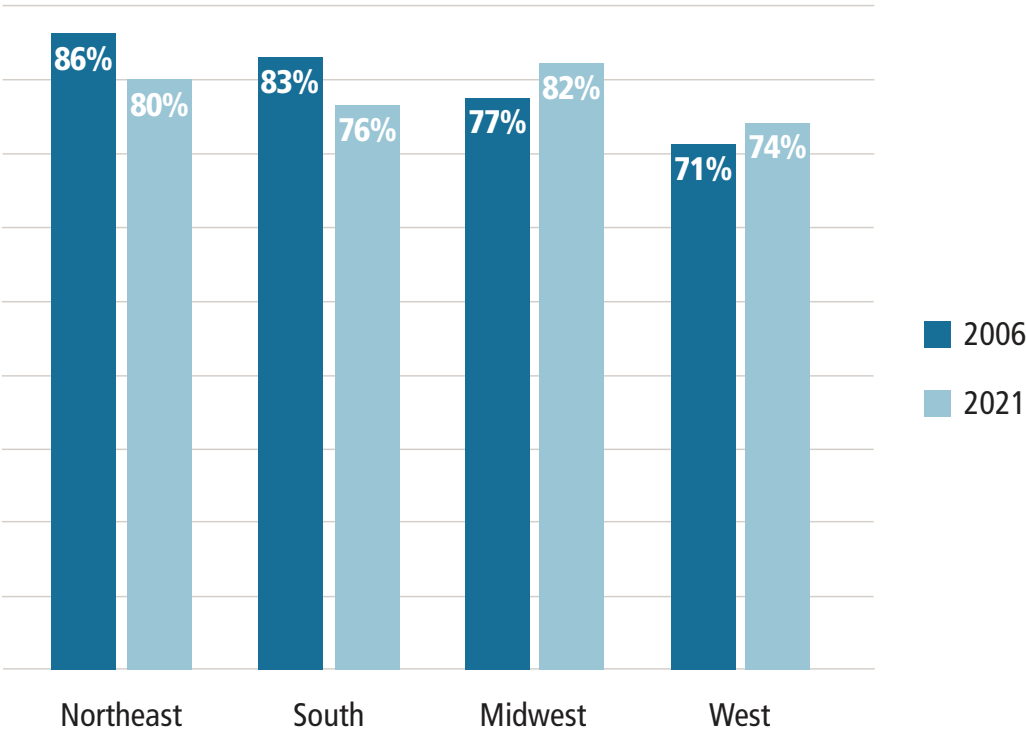


Despite the low percentage of new members (about 10% increase in 10 years), those affiliated with MC USA are typically active churchgoers. Just over three-quarters (76%) of current members are active in their congregation, with 5% attending but not members of a congregation. Only a small percentage (6%) of participants are inactive members or not affiliated with a Mennonite congregation (5%).

Kanagy (2006) found that church attendance of “more than once a week” was about 8% in 2006. Current members indicate that pre-pandemic almost all MC USA’s members attended worship weekly (80%) or more (10%). Most of these folks shifted to virtual attendance weekly (73%) or more (7%) during the pandemic.

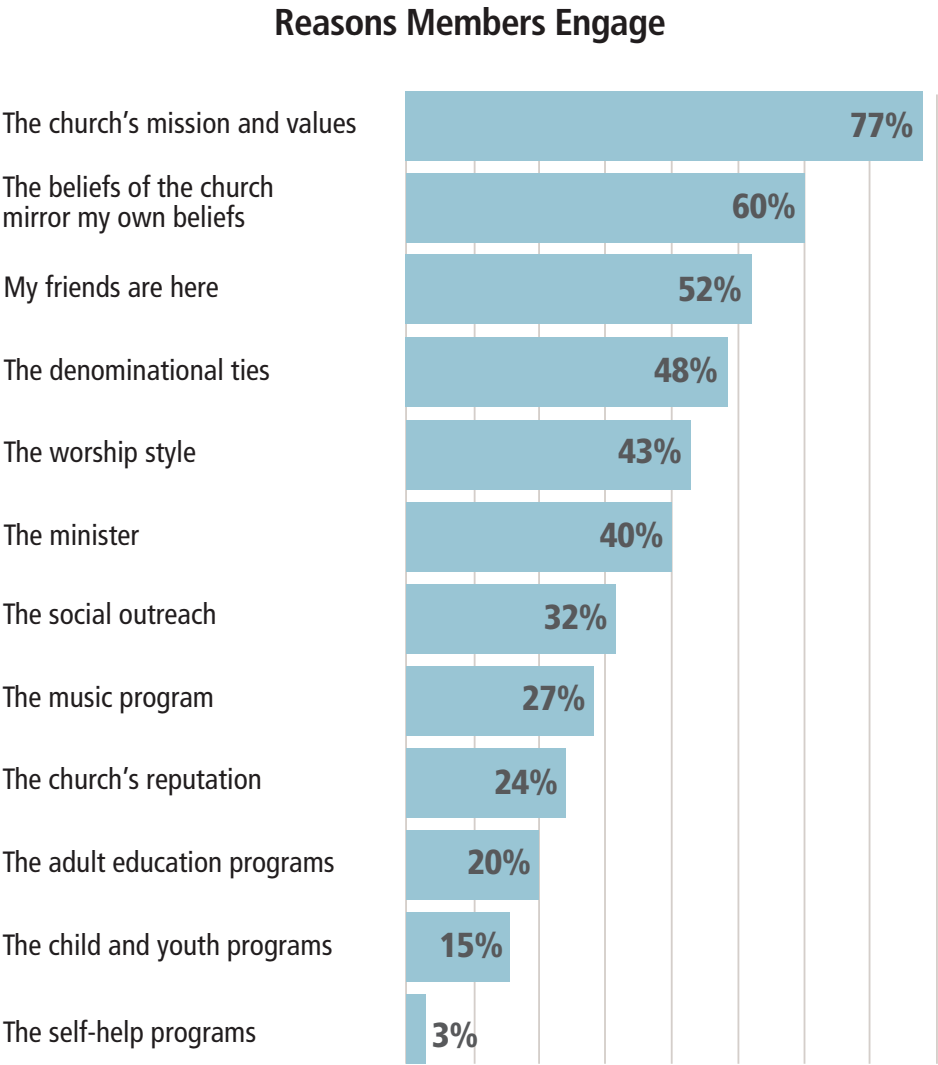
Weekly church attendance is relatively high across regions, with around three-quarters of members in each area attending worship weekly. The highest percentage is in the Midwest (82%), followed by Northeast (80%), South (76%), and West (74%). These numbers have remained relatively consistent since 2005 (Kanagy, 2006). The Northeast and South have seen a slight decrease in the percentage of church members attending worship services every week, 6% and 7%, respectively. The Midwest and West have seen a slight increase in the rate of members who attend church every week, 5% and 3%, respectively.

**Regional Differences in MC USA Members’
Weekly Church Attendance**



Almost three-quarters (73%) of MC USA members spend 0–5 hours a week doing congregational-related activities beyond the worship service, and 21% of participants indicate not engaging in congregational activities outside the worship service. Leading services (30%) and preparing services (24%) are the typical activities that members spend their time on outside worship. Weekly tasks that members do for their congregation include preparing for adult groups (23%), youth classes (17%), and choir services (14%).

Members continue to engage with the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith because of the church’s mission and values (77%), because the beliefs of the church mirror their own beliefs (60%), and because their friends are here (52%).



*Table does not add up to 100% as survey participants were invited to select all that applied.



Just over one-half (54%) of survey participants indicate that anyone who accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord and anyone who wishes to participate (51%) should be allowed to participate in a communion service at their congregation. Nevertheless, current members also suggest that members of any Christian church (29%), members of any Mennonite congregation (22%), and believers of faiths such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism (10%) should be allowed to participate in a communion service at their church.

Inclusion: Who Should Participate?

