



# The Mennonite Experience:

MC USA Membership  
Study 2021–2022



Study conducted by Springtide Research Institute®



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# Introduction

## Intention of the Study

Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) leadership is driven by a deep need to know the social context and life experiences of members in order to serve them appropriately and with care. The last membership study was conducted in 2006 and published in 2007 by Conrad Kanagy, a sociologist and Mennonite. For this current study, MC USA asked Springtide Research Institute®, a sociological research organization, to help them create an updated picture of membership to drive strategic planning through data-driven, actionable insights. MC USA benefits from knowing the demographics of members but, more important, from knowing what keeps members engaging with, belonging to, and thriving in their congregations, the denomination, and the faith.

Springtide's mission revolves around understanding those very phenomena: engaging, belonging, and thriving. Through 63 interviews and 2,276 survey responses, this study dives into members' stories and experiences, providing MC USA with both narratives of members' experiences and statistics about dimensions, including demographics, behaviors, and values. Numbers do tell a story and are valuable to making strategic decisions, but because MC USA is committed to listening in a more robust and intimate manner, this collected combination of statistics and stories can help drive the organization's decisions that will aid how members engage, belong, and thrive as Mennonites.

This study reveals engaged members who want MC USA to be inclusive and open, demonstrating their commitment to following Jesus in their daily life. Members choose practices that embody the foundational element of being Mennonite: peacemaking and nonviolence. This report shows that modern Mennonites are engaging within their congregations, outside their congregations, and with their faith generally as they live out their beliefs. The study highlights ways that members are thriving because of their connection to their faith and how they want others to do the same. Members also share reasons they belong to their congregations, to their denomination, and to their faith.

Overall, MC USA's intention is to use these findings to develop strategic planning and respond to the identified needs of members. This comprehensive report highlights ways to do that by showcasing the people they serve. Although the data in this report may not be entirely representative of all the lived experiences of MC USA's members, it does capture the voices of those who are most engaged. This study will not specifically solve the problem of serving those who are not engaged, but it can help MC USA identify what is working and who is showing up to talk about it.



The following chapters highlight the MC USA Mennonite experience by capturing the findings from the key objectives for this study. Chapter 1 is a developed membership snapshot of MC USA's current constituents. Chapter 2 explores what being Mennonite means to

members, both culturally and spiritually. Chapter 3 uncovers members' experiences with, and understanding of, MC USA. Chapter 4 explores the tenets and philosophies that drive membership. The following section is a high-level summary of the contents of this report.

“My dream for MC USA is that our best theological and polity discernment energy will be spent on nurturing new communities of faith and equipping new leaders that are Anabaptist, welcoming and actively following Jesus into the beloved community. I hope that we will grow in our welcome of nonethnic Mennonites, and that this welcome will include not only individuals but congregations and other faith communities who have come to embrace Anabaptist convictions. I pray that we will not be driven by fear but guided by love.” —A.J.



# Methodology

## What Story Does This Data Tell?

Springtide Research Institute designed and conducted a custom study for MC USA, including a survey of members to establish basic demographics, interviews with volunteer survey respondents to better understand their experiences as Mennonites, and a tailored comparison to secondary data sources to examine changes happening over time in the Mennonite Church.

To design the research project, Springtide conducted “discovery” calls with MC USA stakeholders to identify the set of clarified objectives noted below. Springtide then used those objectives to build the research tools, examine secondary data sources, conduct the fully synthesized analysis, and develop the findings in this report. These objectives are also the titles of the chapters in this report.

## Objectives

**Objective 1:** Develop a membership snapshot of MC USA constituents.

**Objective 2:** Determine what being Mennonite means, both culturally and spiritually.

**Objective 3:** Discover current members’ experiences and understanding of MC USA.

**Objective 4:** Examine tenets and philosophies that drive membership.

## Survey

We used a combination of existing measures and original, customized questions to develop a comprehensive survey about who MC USA members are and what their experiences and expectations of the denomination are. The survey was designed to provide a general view of MC USA but was limited primarily to respondents who are part of MC USA’s mailing list. The survey was launched in July 2021, with 2,276 members completing it.

## Interviews

We interviewed 63 members who opted in during the survey for a follow-up interview to better understand their experiences as Mennonites by listening to their beliefs about what it means to be Mennonite today, experiences with MC USA generally, and where they would like to see the denomination moving forward. Springtide coded these interviews and identified emergent themes that we then used to make recommendations toward the relevant objectives. Quotes from the interviews support the analysis in the subsequent sections.

## Secondary Data Analysis

We compared statistical data presented in Conrad Kanagy’s *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (2007) to our data set to identify the major changes, or lack thereof, in the demographics, beliefs, and behaviors of MC USA members. The data for Kanagy’s study was collected in 2006.