

These Christians May Not Be as Different From You as You Think

Note: This is Part 2 of a two-part interview with author Darla Weaver about her new book, A Gathering of Sisters (Herald Press). To read Part 1, [click here](#).

Q: What does daily life look like for a Mennonite?

In some ways being a Mennonite is not so different from being anyone else. We have one life to live, we work to make a living, take care of our families, make time for the things we enjoy, eat, sleep, pay our bills and taxes. Some days are better than others as for anyone else.

In other ways, it's vastly different from the culture around us. Partly in the conservative way we live, perhaps even more in the way we look at life.

The most important goals for most of us are: Faith in God and in His Son who died on the cross for sinners; growing into a closer walk with him; learning to love, serve and obey His commandments. These beliefs help shape our lives as we grow older.

Old Order Mennonite life is family-oriented. It centers around our church, our families, our schools and neighborhoods. It has been said, "Destroy the home and you destroy the nation," which has been proven true in various eras of history. God's plan for one husband and one wife, working together to care for their children, is a most important foundation for our lifestyle.

But, of course, we are far from perfect. Although the majority of us strive to live lives that demonstrate a faith and love

and steadfastness rooted deep in God and his word—the Bible—we make plenty of mistakes too. Stumbling and falling and getting up to try again, praying that God will help us do better tomorrow, is a part of life, too.

Q: Do Old Order Mennonites believe in the new birth?

Of course. We believe the Bible truth: “Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

It is when one believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God that God’s Spirit comes into one’s heart. It is by repenting of and turning away from our sins that they can be forgiven. It is by faith in God’s power, and asking in prayer, help us break away from sin’s strongholds. And it is because of that new birth that we desire to live a life that God can bless and sanctify.

But those who grow up in Christian homes may not always be able to pinpoint a certain day or year when their new birth occurred. To say, “When were you born again?” is a little like asking, “When did you grow up?” Sometimes there is a specific date to remember. Just as often there isn’t, because we grew so gradually into the awareness of our need for a personal Savior.

Was there ever a time I didn’t know and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to die for my sins? If so, I can’t remember it. I did have to come to the place where I was willing to accept that for myself, acknowledge all the sin in my life and turn to God for help and forgiveness. That day came, gradually. When I asked Christ into my heart to be ruler there, it led to more years of growing up, and into what it means to be one of his disciples.

When I was born physically, I still had much to learn. When I was born again spiritually, I had just as much to learn about living a Christ-centered life. I’m still learning about it. I imagine I’ll be learning more for as long as I live.

Q: What could a visitor expect at one of your church services?

Church services last around 2 to 2 ½ hours and are in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, although the Bible reading is done in German. They begin with everyone singing together. One of the ministers then has a short sermon, which is followed by silent prayer. Then a second minister explains a chapter from the New Testament, or part of a chapter that he had selected and studied previously. Services are closed with an audible prayer, more singing and the benediction.

It's a special time of singing, praying and worshipping God together with our congregation, and is full of encouragement and inspiration.

Q: Throughout most of the country, we would find most businesses open at least part of the day on Sunday. Would we find any businesses in your community open on Sunday?

"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Ex. 20:8-9).

When Sunday comes around, those of us who own businesses do close them, and most of our work is put aside. Sunday is kept as a day to go to church to worship God, then spend it socializing with family and friends. It is a day to get together for meals, visit families who have a new baby or just relax at home.

Sometimes when it's warm, we go fishing or hiking at nearby state parks or in our own woods. Sometimes we go on picnics or visit the neighbors. In the evening, the youth group gathers at one of their homes to play volleyball, sing and eat.

Sunday is set aside for worship, rest and family time. It's refreshing, both spiritually and physically, to have one day each week reserved for that. Work almost always waits. Worshiping God is first priority, then being with family.

Q: What kind of activities are your youth groups involved in?

Most of the young people are part of a structured youth group that gathers each Sunday evening in one of their homes. If it's warm, they play volleyball before singing hymns. A snack is served, unless everyone is invited for supper, when an entire meal is served. This can be quite an undertaking for the hostess, depending on the size of the group.

While Sunday evening gatherings are a regular thing, there are sometimes "work bees" during the week, when the young people get together to help someone who needs it. They might go to sing at a nursing home, go skating in winter, fishing in summer or other upbuilding activities.

The majority of the young people are a part of this group and are dedicated to serving God. However, the upper teen years can be hard whether you're Mennonite or not, and there are always some who drift away and choose not to live as part of our culture.

Q: Can you tell us about your private schools?

Parochial schools are a vital part of our neighborhoods. Three men serve as the school board for each one, and they are in charge of hiring teachers, handling the financial part of running a school, upkeep of the building and any other need that comes up. They serve in three-year terms and are up for one re-election at the regular yearly community meeting where all directors and trustees for various things are selected.

Most schoolhouses have two classrooms and two teachers. The number of children attending each one varies greatly. Parents pay a yearly tuition which covers the teachers' pay, books and supplies, and building repairs.

Most children start first grade in September after their sixth birthday. They graduate after completing eighth grade.

Each school day starts with a Bible story, reciting the Lord's prayer together and singing. Lessons include, but are not limited to, reading, writing, math, spelling, English, vocabulary, history, geography, some science and nature study. Curriculum varies a little from school to school and from one area to the next, but these are the basics.

Religion is not taught as a subject. Rather, faith in God and Christian living as based on the Bible, is woven into almost every textbook and lesson. It's a way of life for us and can't be separated into a single subject. {eo}

Darla Weaver is a homemaker, gardener, writer and Old Order Mennonite living in the hills of southern Ohio. She is the author of *Water My Soul*, *Many Lighted Windows* and *Gathering of Sisters*. Weaver has written for *Family Life*, *Ladies Journal*, *Young Companion* and other magazines for Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups. Before her three children were born she also taught school. Her hobbies are gardening and writing.