

Amish Beliefs and Practices

I. History

1. "The history of the Amish church began with a schism in Switzerland within a group of Swiss and Alsatian Anabaptists in 1693 led by Jakob Ammann. Those who followed Ammann became known as Amish." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)
2. The Amish began to emigrate to Pennsylvania in the early 18th century due to its then policy of religious tolerance.
3. The Amish are similar, but distinct from the Mennonites.
4. The "real Amish" are the *Old Order Amish*.
5. The Amish today number at approximately 308,000 in 27 US states.
 - A. They are predominately found in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana.
 - B. There are also relatively substantial Amish populations in Wisconsin, New York, Michigan, Missouri, and Kentucky.
 - C. "The Amish are among the fastest-growing populations in the world, with an average of seven children per family." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)

II. Beliefs

1. Nature of God
 - A. The Amish are orthodox when it comes to the nature of God.
 - B. They believe in the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ.
 - C. "Both Mennonites and Amish believe in one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17)." (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, [LancasterPA.com](#), 2/14/17)
 - D. From this statement, they likely believe in the eternal Sonship of Christ.
2. Salvation
 - A. The Amish basically hold to an Arminian belief concerning eternal salvation.
 - i. "We believe that Jesus Christ, God's only Son, died on the cross for the sins of the world. We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, and also empowers believers for service and holy living. We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, a free gift bestowed by God on those who repent and believe." (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, [LancasterPA.com](#), 2/14/17)
 - ii. This statement could have been made by any freewill Baptist.
 - B. Works-based salvation
 - i. The Amish rely on works for salvation more than the average Arminian Evangelical.
 - ii. "The Amish believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that He died for their sins, and that He is the way to salvation. However, many Amish also practice a works-based relationship with God. They view their good works as earning favor with God. If their good works outweigh the bad works, they feel God will allow them into heaven." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, [GotQuestions.org](#), 2/14/17)
 - iii. "Although the Amish profess salvation by grace, many of their congregations practice salvation by works. They believe God decides their eternal destiny by weighing their lifelong obedience to the rules of the church against their disobedience." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, [Christianity.about.com](#), 2/14/17)

- C. No assurance of salvation or eternal security
 - i. "As a group, the Amish do not believe in the security of salvation. They believe a person can lose his/her salvation if he/she strays from the path, or falls from grace." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, GotQuestions.org, 2/14/17)
 - ii. "Thankfully, some (or many) members of the Amish church do believe that Jesus paid the full price for their sins, and have truly received the grace so freely given by God. Sadly, others cling to the "works-based" philosophy, believing their salvation is based on their "right" actions." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, GotQuestions.org, 2/14/17)
 - iii. "While the Amish share the belief of most Protestants that salvation is an unearned gift from God, they don't believe that faith automatically guarantees salvation. Many reject the belief common to other Protestant denominations that anyone can be certain that his salvation is guaranteed. They consider such certainty to be arrogant." (*5 Beliefs That Set the Amish Apart From Other Protestant Christians*, Newsmax.com, 4/1/15)
 - iv. "Amish are zealous about humility. They hold that personal belief in eternal security is a sign of arrogance. They reject this doctrine." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
- 3. Afterlife
 - A. The Amish believe in a literal heaven and hell.
 - B. "In Amish beliefs, heaven and hell are real places. Heaven is the reward for those who believe in Christ and follow the church's rules. Hell awaits those who reject Christ as Savior and live as they please." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
- 4. Baptism
 - A. The Amish believe in and practice believers' baptism.
 - B. But they do so by pouring or sprinkling.
 - i. "They do not believe in infant baptism, but do "sprinkle" for adult baptism, rather than immerse in water." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, GotQuestions.org, 2/14/17)
 - ii. "As Anabaptists, the Amish practice adult baptism, or what they call "believer's baptism," because the person is old enough to choose what they believe in. A deacon pours a cup of water into the bishop's hands and onto the candidate's head three times, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
 - iii. Therefore, the Amish churches are not true churches since they don't have a truly baptized membership.
- 5. Communion
 - A. "Communion is practiced twice a year, in the spring and in the fall." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
 - B. "Communion service is held in the spring and fall. Church members receive a piece of bread from a large, round loaf, put it in their mouth, genuflect, then sit down to eat it. Wine is poured into a cup and each person takes a sip." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
- 6. Feetwashing

- A. The Amish practice the ordinance of feetwashing.
 - B. "Men, sitting in one room, take buckets of water and wash each other's feet. Women, sitting in another room, do the same thing." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
7. Church service
- A. The Amish meet in a different member's home every other Sunday for church.
 - B. They do not have church buildings.
 - C. "Amish conduct worship services in each others' homes, on alternating Sundays. On other Sundays, they visit neighboring congregations, family, or friends." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
 - D. "With hymns and sermons, the communion service can last over three hours. Men quietly slip a cash offering into the deacon's hand for emergency or aid expenses in the community. This is the only time an offering is given." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
 - E. "A short sermon is given, lasting about a half hour, while the main sermon lasts about an hour. Deacons or ministers speak sermons in the Pennsylvania German dialect while hymns are sung in High German. After the three-hour service, the people eat a light lunch and socialize. Children play outside or in the barn. Members begin to drift home in the afternoon." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
8. No musical instruments
- A. The Amish do not use musical instruments in church.
 - B. "Members sing hymns in unison, but no musical instruments are played. Amish consider them too worldly." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
9. No Evangelism
- A. "Many Amish, on the other hand, feel no obligation to evangelize, preferring to let their faith show by the way they live. In fact, the Amish rarely accept converts." (*5 Beliefs That Set the Amish Apart From Other Protestant Christians*, Newsmax.com, 4/1/15)
 - B. "Originally, the Amish evangelized, as do most Christian denominations, but over the years seeking converts and spreading the gospel became less and less of a priority, to the point that it is not done at all today." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, Christianity.about.com, 2/14/17)
 - C. "Early Anabaptists, the ancestors of Amish and Mennonites, were very evangelistic, going everywhere preaching and teaching. This was a sharp contrast to the "Christian" society in which they lived. Persecution followed and many Anabaptists died for their faith and their zeal for evangelism. In the years that followed, missionary zeal decreased. The church succumbed to persecution and discrimination. Gradually Amish and Mennonites became known more for their traditional practices and their quiet, peaceful way of life and less for their active evangelism. This trend continued until it seemed almost wrong to send members out of the close community to evangelize. Old Order Amish, along with some Old Order Mennonites, have retained this position and desire to remain "the quiet in the land.'" (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, LancasterPA.com, 2/14/17)

- D. "Only a few outsiders have ever joined the Amish. Since 1950 only some 75 people have joined and remained members of the Amish. Since 1990 some twenty people of Russian Mennonite background have joined the Amish in Aylmer, Ontario." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)

10. Humility

- A. "The Amish value rural life, manual labor and humility, all under the auspices of living what they interpret to be God's word." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)
- B. "Two key concepts for understanding Amish practices are their rejection of *Hochmut* (pride, arrogance, haughtiness) and the high value they place on *Demut* (humility) and *Gelassenheit* (calmness, composure, placidity), often translated as "submission" or "letting-be". *Gelassenheit* is perhaps better understood as a reluctance to be forward, to be self-promoting, or to assert oneself. The Amish's willingness to submit to the "Will of Jesus", expressed through group norms, is at odds with the individualism so central to the wider American culture." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)

11. Separation from the world

- A. "Isolating themselves from the rest of society is one of the key Amish beliefs. They think secular culture has a polluting effect and, therefore, to avoid the use of television, radios, computers, and modern appliances, they do not hook up to the electrical grid." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, [Christianity.about.com](#), 2/14/17)
- B. "One scripture often quoted in Amish worship services is: "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2) They are admonished to live a life that is separate from the world." (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, [LancasterPA.com](#), 2/14/17)

12. Separation of church and State

- A. "Amish grant primary authority to the church and reject any civilian authority that contradicts it. Amish beliefs, for example, forbid acceptance of any public funds. Therefore, retired Amish receive no Social Security benefits. On the other hand, they're not legally obligated to pay Social Security taxes, either (per a 1961 Supreme Court Decision). They don't educate their children past eighth grade, and they avoid joining the military. In addition, when required to testify in court, they do not swear oaths. Instead, they make "affirmations of truth," according to Religious Tolerance." (*5 Beliefs That Set the Amish Apart From Other Protestant Christians*, [Newsmax.com](#), 4/1/15)

13. Nonresistance (pacifism)

- A. "The Amish, most of whom live in the United States, follow simple customs and refuse to take oaths, vote, or perform military service." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, [GotQuestions.org](#), 2/14/17)
- B. "As present-day Anabaptists, Amish church members practice nonresistance and will not perform any type of military service." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)

14. No pictures

- A. The Amish forbid pictures being taken of them.
- B. "Old Order Amish and Mennonites forbid photography of their people, and their objection is based on the second commandment, Exodus 20:4: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or

that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth". (Amish Faith and Beliefs, LancasterPA.com, 2/14/17)

15. Resistance to using modern technology

- A. "The Amish anti-individualist orientation is the motive for rejecting labor-saving technologies that might make one less dependent on community. Modern innovations like electricity might spark a competition for status goods, or photographs might cultivate personal vanity." (Amish, Wikipedia, 2/14/17)
- B. "They shun modern technology and conveniences. Transportation for the Amish is by horse and buggy. They do not have electricity or telephones in their homes. The men usually wear beards and pants with buttons instead of zippers. The women wear white head coverings and plain dresses, usually without buttons—they use straight pins to fasten the clothing." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, GotQuestions.org, 2/14/17)
- C. Different Amish communities use various levels of technology spanning from tractors for fieldwork, which very few use, to inside flush toilets, running water bathtubs, pneumatic tools, and motorized washing machines which the majority use. (Amish, Wikipedia, 2/14/17)

16. Social security and insurance

- A. The Amish are morally opposed to Social Security and insurance in general.
- B. "The Amish are subject to sales and property taxes. As they seldom own motor vehicles, they rarely have occasion to pay motor vehicle registration fees or spend money in the purchase of fuel for vehicles. Under their beliefs and traditions, generally the Amish do not agree with the idea of Social Security benefits and have a religious objection to insurance. On this basis, the United States Internal Revenue Service agreed in 1961 that they did not need to pay Social Security-related taxes. In 1965, this policy was codified into law. Self-employed individuals in certain sects do not pay into nor receive benefits from the United States Social Security system. This exemption applies to a religious group that is conscientiously opposed to accepting benefits of any private or public insurance, provides a reasonable level of living for its dependent members and has existed continuously since December 31, 1950." (Amish, Wikipedia, 2/14/17)

III. Practices

1. Ordnung (oral tradition of rules of the church)

- A. "Amish lifestyle is regulated by the Ordnung (German, meaning: order), which differs slightly from community to community, and, within a community, from district to district. What is acceptable in one community may not be acceptable in another. Bearing children, raising them, and socializing with neighbors and relatives are the greatest functions of the Amish family. All Amish believe large families are a blessing from God." (Amish, Wikipedia, 2/14/17)
- B. "The Ordnung is an oral tradition of rules and expectations that govern every aspect of Amish life, private, public and ceremonial. Rather than being a written set of rules that must be memorized, the Ordnung is taught by living it, much like children absorb and learn their native tongue by living it. It's a code of conduct that evolved over decades, and it differs slightly from one Amish congregation to another." (*5 Beliefs That Set the Amish Apart From Other Protestant Christians*, Newsmax.com, 4/1/15)

2. Rumspringa ("running around")
 - A. "During adolescence rumspringa ("running around") in some communities, nonconforming behavior that would result in the shunning of an adult who had made the permanent commitment of baptism, may meet with a degree of forbearance." (*Amish*, [Wikipedia](#), 2/14/17)
 - B. "The youth are given the opportunity to taste of "the world" in their late teens to determine if they want to join the church. Many young Amish people get involved in drugs, alcohol, sex, and other vices during this time period while they are allowed to own a motor vehicle, but a large number then do give up the vehicle and join the church. Others determine they will not join the church and attempt to fit into the secular world." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, [GotQuestions.org](#), 2/14/17)
3. Shunning (excommunication)
 - A. "Spiritually speaking, the Amish are very similar to the traditional Jews that keep the Old Testament Law. They have a long list of do's and don'ts. If they fail to keep the list, they are in trouble with the church and are in danger of being shunned. Shunning is a form of excommunication. If they partake of the "worldly" things, they are shunned by the church people." (*Who are the Amish, and what are their beliefs?*, [GotQuestions.org](#), 2/14/17)
 - B. "One of the controversial Amish beliefs, shunning, is the practice of social and business avoidance of members who violate the rules. Shunning is rare in most Amish communities and is done as a last resort. Those who are excommunicated are always welcomed back if they repent." (*Amish Beliefs and Practices*, [Christianity.about.com](#), 2/14/17)
 - C. "those who break their baptismal vows are shunned by the Old Order Amish. "Belonging" is important and shunning is meant to be redemptive. It is not an attempt to harm or ruin the individual and in most cases it does bring that member back into the fellowship again. Actually, the number of members excommunicated and shunned by the Amish is small." (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, [LancasterPA.com](#), 2/14/17)
 - D. "The families of a shunned member are expected to also shun them. Families shun the person by not eating at the same table with them. The practice of shunning makes family gatherings especially awkward." (*Amish Faith and Beliefs*, [LancasterPA.com](#), 2/14/17)