

Appendix J: Plain Anabaptist Groups

The plain Anabaptists of North America encompass seven major traditions: the Swiss-German Mennonites, the Russian Mennonites (also, “Low German” / “Canadian” / “Mexican” / “Dutch” / “Dietsch”), the Hutterites, the Old Order Amish and Amish-Mennonites, the German Baptists / Brethren, the Apostolic Christians / Nazarenes (Froelich churches), and the Bruderhof. I analyzed most denominations in these traditions for this project. Due to the plain Anabaptists’ localized congregational emphasis, they have experienced numerous schisms. Very few plain Anabaptist groups number over 10,000 members. Consequently, the plain Anabaptist population profile is organizationally fragmented and difficult to enumerate.

Over the past decade, I carefully built a database of North American plain Anabaptist denominations. Using directories, informants, and on-site visits, I located meetinghouses on online aerial maps and generated GPS coordinates, thus establishing precise locations so that all adherent information is connected to the county of a given meetinghouse.

Because regular church service attendance is mandatory in nearly all plain Anabaptist denominations, I collected information on membership, adherents (i.e. total population), and congregation but did not collect information on average attendance. Average attendance should approximate adherents in all settings except Biblical Mennonite Alliance, which has separate figures for attendance averages.

To collect population information, I relied on a combination of print resources (“directories”), personal contacts, and even site visits. Many plain Anabaptist denominations produce directories that include household and congregational information, mostly for internal use. For example, in a given directory, 12 congregations might be listed for a small denomination, each congregation lists all households, and each household lists the names of the husband and wife as well as their children and birth dates.

Because plain Anabaptist people are almost completely made up of adult members and their children, adherent rates are easy to estimate when directories are available. Some denominations indicate membership (those baptized as adults); others do not. It is reasonable to expect that, in most cases, anyone listed in the directory is an adherent—and late adolescents and adults are members—unless noted otherwise in the directory. Where it was evident in particular settings that many listed were not adherents—due to higher attrition or families divided by recent schisms—but this was not notated in the directory, I made appropriate manual adjustments.

One annual, multi-denominational directory published by a non-profit, non-denominational plain Anabaptist organization list membership numbers for congregations across around 25 U.S. denominations (this resource is an independent effort in addition to any denominationally-produced directories). We collaborated to solicit adherent numbers for denominations, even though these would not be printed in their directory. Response was extensive but accuracy seemed uneven, based on denomination and individual congregations. Denominational household-type directories were used to supplement this information. Furthermore, the multi-denominational directory does not accurately list all congregations in the correct denomination or movement; I made manual adjustments to congregational affiliation based on cross-referencing sources and personal knowledge.

The primary challenge of using single-denomination directories listing full households is the date of release. For several of the larger groups releasing directories not on 2020, I either (1) used a 2021 or 2022 directory and dropped children born after Jan 1, 2020, or (2) used an older directory (2019 or prior) and estimated the number of additional children that were likely born between then and Jan 1, 2020.

When two or more sources of population data were available, I cross-referenced sources. Where no directory information was available, I made individual contacts with each congregation and asked for a manual tally or made contacts with neighbors or others connected to a group for an estimate. When possible, I solicited multiple estimates and took the mean of these estimates.

For congregations unrepresented in directories where I had no contacts, I visited local meetinghouses and spoke with locals to obtain reliable population estimates.

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