

So you have been invited to our church! Or maybe you're thinking about attending a Mennonite church service because you are interested in the Mennonites. If you have ever wondered how Mennonites are different from other Christians and would like to know more, please come and see! I also wondered about Mennonites and their services until I started attending a Mennonite church. Here are some tips on what to expect.

Mennonites are different from other Christians in a number of ways. They take Bible teachings literally and attempt to live them out rather than just accepting them as suggestions or avoiding parts of the Bible. This was a great blessing to me. No church is perfect, but I came to believe that putting God's Word into practice is vitally important for the Christian.

So it should be no surprise that the church building itself is also different. The cross and its importance to us as Christians is often discussed and preached on, but crosses are rarely placed in the building as symbols. There is no worship or veneration of symbols. There are no expensive or flashy decorations. There is no stained glass to give the building a sense of holiness or to enhance the worship experience. Mennonites believe holiness is internal and should be part of every Christian's life.

Worship is to be in spirit and truth, religious symbols and ornamentation do not truly enhance it. The building portrays simplicity.

Many Mennonites may not realize the importance of simplicity or see it as unusual in any way, but for us who are new it speaks volumes. It speaks of God being interested in the heart. Unnecessary distractions during worship and preaching are avoided. If one continues attending, he learns that the preaching and teaching of the Word of God are very important to the church. There is no desire to put on a show.

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As you are about to be seated, you may notice another significant difference. Though men and women sit together at times, in many churches men and women sit

separately, with men on one side and women on the other. This may seem unusual, but it is a blessing because it leads to fewer distractions. It makes it easier to focus on the Lord and eliminates the awkwardness of kneeling beside or bumping into a member of the opposite gender.

Kneeling for prayer may also be different for us who are new. It is, however, a historical

part of Christianity and displays a humble attitude when seeking God. The Scriptures many times describe the early Christians kneeling for prayer, including Acts 20:36, which says: “When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.” It is only recently that many churches have dropped the practice of kneeling for prayer.

This does not preclude remaining seated during prayer. Some folks are not able to kneel due to a physical condition. Sometimes the congregation remains seated or stands for prayer, such as at the close of the service. Prayer occurs a number of times throughout the service. Praying together adds to the unity of the Christians in attendance.

Conservative Mennonites also dress differently—but do you know why? The women wear very modest clothing and a head covering. The Scriptures tell Christian women how they should dress. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9, 10 wrote, “In like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”

Mennonite women also cover their heads in obedience to the Scriptures. Although it is not a popular idea in modern society, 1 Corinthians 11:3 says: “But I would have you know that the

head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” Later, the same chapter teaches women to cover their heads as a symbol of being under authority (verse 10). Christian women are to be subject to their husbands. The wearing of a head covering also adds a sense of purity and promotes separation from worldly influences.

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a different type of suit coat without lapels known as a plain coat. Although there is no particular verse from the Bible teaching men to wear certain clothing, they attempt to dress modestly and simply. When not wearing the plain coat to church (in warmer weather) the men will wear long-sleeve dress

shirts with the top button buttoned. Both men and women avoid flashiness and showiness in order to concentrate on the inward person and not draw attention to themselves.

The music of a Mennonite church is also strikingly different from that in many churches. Services usually begin with singing hymns from

a hymnal without any instrumental accompaniment. In fact, musical instruments are noticeably absent. Congregational singing with only human voices adds a tremendous dimension of purity. Most modern worship copies non-Christian music, such as country or rock music. Having visited many churches before attending a conservative Mennonite church, I find the music in our churches refreshing, pure, simple, and good.

The Scripture teaches this type of worship: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). Some have said that using instruments is the Old Testament way of worshipping, and singing only with our voices is the New Testament way. I’m not a theologian, but I can tell you from experience, that there is something amazing about a congregation of redeemed people singing from their hearts to the Lord, using only their voices and nothing else. Another difference from most modern worship is that although the song leader stands up front, he is simply leading the songs. He is not putting on a show or acting like a secular music star.

After the singing, a brother offers some devotional thoughts relating to the Sunday school lesson. He might share Scriptures or a story to illustrate a point. As he dismisses the