

Amish (Old Order Amish Mennonite Church)

The Amish tradition began in seventeenth century Switzerland and southern Germany among the followers of the Mennonite leader Jakob Ammann. Ammann's controversial teachings regarding excommunicated members caused a division between his followers and other Mennonite believers. Most of those who followed Ammann emigrated to North America essentially eliminating an Amish presence in Europe.

Core Beliefs: The Amish honor the bible as the word of God and base their beliefs on certain interpretations of the bible, especially passages emphasizing the principle of separation from the world. The Amish also emphasize the biblical principles of caring for one another, especially in times of need or disaster. They do not participate in Social Security or commercial insurance coverage because they believe it undermines faith in God and dependence on one another. The Amish believe in eighteen articles of faith written in 1632 as an Anabaptist confession of faith. Those who wish to be baptized in the Amish tradition review these articles which also include the distinct teachings regarding nonviolence, excommunication, and shunning.

More info: [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Dordrecht Confession of Faith \(Mennonite, 1632\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Dordrecht_Confession_of_Faith_(Mennonite,_1632))
<https://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies>

Practices and Rituals: There are two main rituals in the Amish tradition, baptism and communion. Believers are baptized at the age of eighteen, it is only at this age of maturity that they can make the choice whether to be baptized or not. This is seen as a lifelong commitment to God and the Amish community and is not taken lightly. If someone breaks the vows they made at baptism they are completely shut off and shunned from the community. Before youth make the decision to be baptized, they are allowed to leave their community and experience the outside world for the first time. This practice is known as "Rumspringa" and during this time youth are not under the authority of their parents or the church and can live as if they weren't a part of the Amish tradition. Communion is held every autumn and spring and is viewed as the forgiveness of sins and is only available to those who have been baptized. Before marriage Amish men and women practice what is called "bundling". This is when the man and woman who are engaged sleep in the same bed while fully clothed. This practice is not sexual in nature, in fact no physical contact is allowed whatsoever. It is seen as a way to get to know someone before marrying them which is important in a community that regularly practices arranged marriages. Bundling happens at the young woman's home where the young man is let in by her father. When a member of the Amish community passes away everyone springs into action taking care of all the domestic responsibilities of the family of the deceased. Family members of the same sex dress the body in white clothing and place it in a handmaid wooden coffin. Later the coffin is lowered into a grave dug by hand by other members of the community.

More info: <https://www.amishbaskets.com/blogs/blog/amish-baptism-ritual>

Places of Worship: The Amish do not have church buildings but meet for worship services in rooms of their homes and sometimes shops and barns. These worship services typically rotate between homes of different members coming to each member's house once a year depending on the numbers of the community. These worship services are simple; there is no instrumental music but rather slow unison singing in German. Before the meeting starts the leaders meet and decide who will preach. They teach in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect and do not use notes but speak from inspiration.

Leadership and Clergy: In the Amish belief system ordained officials are simply called servants and typically serve for life. The most important credential is living consistent to Amish principles. Leaders are not paid and support themselves by other occupations. Leaders are chosen using the biblical practice of selecting "lots." Nominated names are written on slips of paper and placed inside the cover of a hymnbook. The books are randomly mixed and then a few are chosen out. This is seen as allowing God to choose their leadership.

Symbols and Icons: The Amish are most readily identified by their clothing which resembles that of seventeenth century European peasants. This is a symbol of their commitment to be humble and separate from the world. The horse and carriage is the most iconic symbol of the Amish with horse and carriage signs marking Amish communities on public roads. As Christians the symbol of the cross is used in remembrance of Christ though the most frequently seen symbol may be the hex sign or "barn star" which wards off evil and represents abundance and good fortune, often associated with harvests.

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