

Amish-Mennonite Population Report



2012



This is a brief overview of figures emerging from a January 2012 census of the Amish-Mennonites. In addition to the statistics, this report contains discussion on the population study findings and what the figures mean for Beachy churches today. All figures are for the U.S. and Canada only.

Figure 1: Population Overview

	Membership	Adherents	Churches
Ambassadors A.M.	329	641	6
Beachy A.M.	7,562	12,648	100
Berea A.M.	501	866	11
Maranatha A.M.	983	1,823	15
Mennonite Christian Fellowship	1,277	2,489	24
Midwest Beachy	366	707	6
Spring Garden-type	790	1,335	9
Unaffiliated A.M.	1,152	1,955	29
TOTAL	12,960	22,464	201

How Population Changes Cause Splits and What We Can Do About It: A Proposal to Strengthen All Churches

The Beachy *movement* is perhaps one of the most diverse Anabaptist groups. Presently, there are many different organized denominations, informal networks of unaffiliated churches, and clusters even within the official Beachy denomination. The Beachy movement is also a growing movement. There are now around 13,000 members in the U.S. and Canada alone (Fig. 1). By all signs, Beachys will continue to increase. But Beachys were not always this large. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the Beachy churches grew slowly. There were only 3,000 to 4,000 members during that time. Ministers' meetings were small, and people knew each other well. There was still diversity, but much less than today.

As the Beachy movement increased growth momentum in the 1970s, churches began to face more turmoil. For all of us, it has been difficult to watch the divisions and church crises that continue to today. We have had *at least* 25 church crises this past decade, many resulting in new congregations. Further, over the past 20 years, new churches starting through splits have steadily increased among Beachys, while coordinated outreaches have decreased (Fig. 3). There are now more divisions than outreaches, two-to-one.

But, *why* do churches hit crisis points and divide?

For many reasons of course, but there is one often overlooked. Think of it this way. Your church is holding a picnic. The first people show up early. The nine of them—young, old, male, female—stand together and talk: few people, one conversation. Another 15 show up and overwhelm the single conversation. Gradually, one large group of 24 becomes three groups, one for men, one for women, one for children. Another 28 show up and transform the picnic grounds into an environment of eight conversations. Now there is a group for those who take an interest in softball and another of school girls who romp in the

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creek. Four middle-aged ladies talk about gardening, while elsewhere five talk about babies. Five men spearhead the meat preparation, chatting over the flames. When all have finally arrived, there are 19 conversations going on simultaneously.

As you add more people, there become more small groups. People like the intimacy of small groups. Each can have meaningful contributions, and you know the people in your group have the same

Figure 2: Six Largest Amish-Mennonite Settlements, By:

TOTAL CHURCHES	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL ADHERENTS
Holmes Co., OH 11	Lancaster Co., PA 1,106	Lancaster Co., PA 1,809
Northern Indiana 10	Holmes Co., OH 821	Holmes Co., OH 1,345
Lancaster Co., PA 8	Northern Indiana 753	Northern Indiana 1,190
Daviess Co., IN 7	Daviess Co., IN 612	Daviess Co., IN 1,076
Southern Ontario 7	Southern Ontario 446	Southern Ontario 723
Central Virginia 5	Central Virginia 415	Central Virginia 641

likes, sympathies, and feelings as you. You know them all personally. After all, birds of a feather flock together. And that is not bad! The Beachy movement has grown quite large. Just its sheer size means that it is going to be

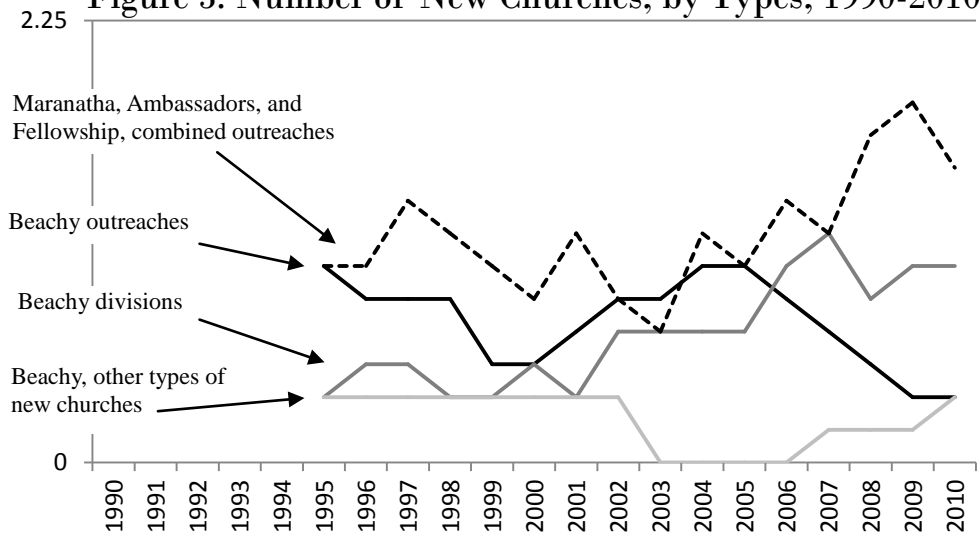
diverse. Think about this: our churches have produced different expressions in our policies on electronics, dress, programs, outreach types, church services, and leisure activities, perhaps even the way we walk, talk, and think. To be “Beachy” means something to everyone, but it means a lot of different things. With all this diversity, is there a way we can all still be “Beachy”? What is to be done for those who are on one edge or the other? Anyone is free to leave, but this is not as simple as it sounds. We want to be considerate of one another and respectful. There are also informal pressures; people talk and speculate.

It is not the goal here to assess the merits of where people are in respect to this variation, or to say who the “real Beachys” are, but to remind us of the variation present. *The sheer spike in church crises demonstrates that we have been unable to cope productively with diversity.* Is this a fair conclusion? No blame needs to fall anywhere or on anyone to assess this statement, and saying “yes” need not even be associated with a feeling of failure, but rather opportunity. Here’s how.

With population growth, there is the potential for clusters of churches to form small specialized groups. Instead of making it so all of the picnic attendees must partake in one large conversation, where only a few voices are heard, we encourage them to form small groups. If you get a cluster of specialized individuals together, they are better able to accomplish their aspirations than if you work with those whose outlook differs. I think of,

for example, some of the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs and urban outreaches run by churches tending towards a BMA format, and I also think of the churches actively supporting *Beside the Still Waters*. Clearly, each is in its element, able to execute their projects with the help of the likeminded. We see a tendency among certain congregations *already* in our Beachy setting to specialize. Consider the Master’s International Mission

Figure 3: Number of New Churches, by Types, 1990-2010



Calculation note: This graph shows why new churches started by the number started. Maranatha, Ambassadors, and Fellowship are combined, as they are smaller groups with a similar vision. To smooth the trend lines, each year is the average of current & previous five years.

in Ukraine, which is supported by a certain set of Beachy churches that have a similar outlook and practice. Contrast that to the types of churches rallying to the Northwest Ontario churches. Or, consider the churches represented by the staff of Hillcrest Home versus Faith Mission Home. Consider the churches who have youth at C.B.S. versus one of the area-wide Bible schools versus not even at a Bible school. *It is unnatural to try to seal these churches together in a single, denominational category and common program. We will only weaken the programs of each and spend much energy wondering about our relationships with the whole group, rather than doing the work God has called us to.*

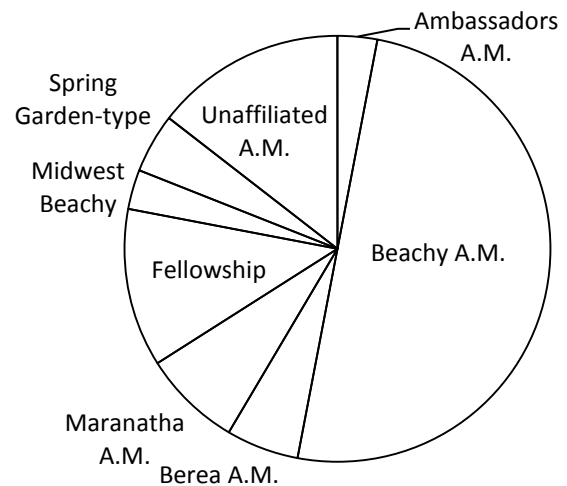
Consider this account from Luke 9:49-50: “And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, **because he followeth not with us.** And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.” What others were doing in the name of Jesus was of concern to the apostles, as it is to us today. Yet, Jesus neither commanded this man to join His group, nor forbade the man from his work. Instead, each group went about God’s work in areas that God had gifted them, neither condemning the work of others, nor forcing an unnatural unity. The disciples of John the Baptist remained with John; they did a work that was different, but as much the work of God as that of Jesus’ disciples. God works in different ways through different groups, and none of us can possibly do it all. We must be faithful in what God has called us to.

What about unity? Unity is precious, and we all long to achieve it, and yet, it is at the price of a low common denominator.¹ When we seek to define unity for a large group of churches, our God-given visions, foci, and standards must be very vague by necessity to fit everyone inside. Any document that describes such a large group must be basic. Is this really the ideal unity? Can any church even find such a document meaningful? A minimum document signifies a minimum unity. People will find this unity does not erase our unease or address the real issues. People will continue to desire more meaningful direction, and they will continue to pursue small niche groups, because that is where clear direction rests.

It is because we emphasize unity at the expense of meaningfulness that there are hurtful divisions. Unity and division actually become different sides of the same coin. And this has been the pattern of Anabaptists historically. They have embraced doctrines of unity and toleration, and then when it failed to stop the reality of humans desiring smaller specialty groups, division occurred, and the cycle continues.² Why? Because advocating unqualified unity trivializes the things important to each group by saying, “That’s not worth dividing over.” Is that a conclusion we should really make for someone else? Unity can inadvertently and unintentionally become the very “disregard of others” it seeks to overcome.

But let us take courage. There is a way to maintain respect for one another, achieve a genuine unity, and each be strengthened and encouraged in our unique callings from God. This way is neither division as we know it, nor a low common denominator unity. Rather, it is something much like the picnic story, whereby subgroups can develop their own, unique emphases that define them. This grants each one

**Figure 4: Amish-Mennonite Subgroups:
Portion of Total Churches**



¹ A common denominator is a number that divides into a set of other numbers. For example, a common denominator of 12, 24, and 48 is 2. This is the lowest common denominator; 12 would be the greatest. The more numbers, the lower the common denominator must be to fit all.

² For example, serious work towards unity occurred prior divisions in the cases of the original Amish division, the Amish-Mennonite conferences of the 1860s-1870s, the Annual Meetings of the Church of the Brethren in the early 1900s, and the Mennonite General Conference from the late 1800s to the present (through several cycles).

confidence and trust in other group members because their practices and ideologies are similar. Again, birds of a feather flock together. This allows each to better mobilize people-resources and accomplish how each subgroup seeks to contribute to God's work. This "specialization" process is not a "division" or "split," which include rejection and tension. Rather, it respects the work of others, acknowledging and appreciating that God grants people different gifts and specializations as they grow numerically. *And by being proactive about this process, we will respect each other, maintaining true unity through a Luke 9:50 toleration.*

How would this actually look? Perhaps like the structure of CASP. Presently, there are around 15 subgroups within CASP. Each develops its own project of alternative service. They do it on their terms, developing rules and programs that resonate with their subgroup. By supporting projects as a subgroup, the interaction bonds them together because they are all alike. Indeed, the smallest subgroups in CASP have some of the highest absolute numbers of involvement. They enjoy working together. They can put their heart into the program without reservation about where the others stand. *And yet, CASP is sponsored by CAM.* CAM is a large organization that has the resources to help all of these small groups. So, though they work separately, they are knitted together through a large agency that makes it possible for small networks of churches to have such programs. CAM is the picnic grounds; CASP subgroups, the many conversations.

"Beachy," as such, would become similar to the role of CAM; subgroups of churches would be like CASP subgroups. The Beachy denomination would provide access to resources available only from a large group. That large group has a constitution with very basic membership guidelines, like the one presented by the bishop committee. It pulls from the talent of each group, people who are grounded in personal beliefs representative of their subgroup, and thereby able to work with several others from different groups. It can oversee the transfer of churches from one group to another, contain committees like the Historical Association and the Peace & Service Committee, but remain out of the defining affairs of subgroups.

Subgroups of churches can develop a meaningful constitution for their group, or have none if they prefer—whatever works for them. They will have a church roster; thus, would-be divisions will need to think twice about splitting, because they cannot just blend into the anonymous Beachy crowd, but must find an intimate subgroup home. Subgroups can rally to the missions they *already* support. We will quickly discover how all missions benefit by coming under the support of a meaningfully unified subgroup that has a unified vision. Two northwest Ontario churches are leaving MIC. Would this have to happen if they could be supported by a Beachy subgroup that has similar values? We talk now of scaling back on the Belize missions; what if a cluster of churches directed their unified effort into them? People from one subgroup can continue to participate in the missions of other subgroups, but I think people will generally want to help their subgroup support their programs.

But, isn't this how it already is? Haven't churches already clustered around certain programs? Why not officially recognize it, act on it, formalize it, and end the worries and frustration among our people of not being on the same page with such a vast gamut of churches? We can protect our appreciation for one another when we maintain unity through specialization. Permitting no provisions for churches to form subgroups is uncharitable, because it is a "last man standing takes all" approach, whereby those remaining are the "real Beachys." This is too often the story of the double sided coin of unity—division.

The logistics need not be overwhelming. At this time, the bishop committee has expressed that it does not feel authorized to coordinate a specialization process. Neither have they said they would not do it; at the 2010 meeting, the bishop committee statement indicated an interest in this sort of possibility. Thus, our constituency may seek to authorize the bishop committee to pursue further action or authorize/develop a special body to coordinate this process. What can be done by leaders and laity? Talk about this. Maybe there are churches you would like to cluster with. Maybe there are ideas you would have to add to this proposal. Many leaders are already considering some kind of action.

May God bless our Beachy churches as we endeavor towards authentic unity and respect for one another, as every one of us seeks to advance His kingdom in the way He has uniquely directed.

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