

## Anabaptist Understandings

We have also been influenced by the Anabaptist faith perspective. The word “Anabaptist” was first used to describe 16th century reformers who insisted on believers baptism rather than infant baptism and emphasized the separation of church and state.

Like our forefathers in the faith, we believe that God’s people are made new in Jesus and are to grow as followers and learners (disciples) of him (Mark 8:27-38; Matthew 5-7).

“ We continually seek a biblical vision of the work and mission of Jesus for individuals and the world. ”

Jesus’ followers announce and publically celebrate their decision to join the family of God by being baptized (Acts 8:34-38; Rom. 10:9-10).

We intend to demonstrate faithfulness to God as we practice holy living and mutual accountability (1 Pet 1:15-16; Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1-2), worship together in community (Heb. 10:25) and join with God to accomplish his mission (Matt. 9:37-38, 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 9:22).

Our authority comes from Scripture and is interpreted within the community of believers as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15). Our mission comes from Jesus’ Great Commandment and his Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20). We are called to love our neighbors (Matt. 22:34-40), to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20) and to make peace through reconciliation with God, ourselves, our enemies and God’s creation (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Matt. 5:38-42). Our mission will almost always be countercultural because our allegiance is to the Lord Jesus. The kingdom he proclaims puts us in tension with the culture around us, which often demands allegiance to other people, governments and temporal values.

To sum up, we proclaim a biblical understanding of God that is both evangelical and Anabaptist. We continually seek a biblical vision of the work and mission of Jesus for individuals and for the world. Our passionate commitment is to live as God’s kingdom agents in the world, anticipating the glorious day when God’s kingdom is perfectly fulfilled.

## Core Convictions

**W**e are a believer’s church: To deal with our human sinfulness, we teach conversion to new life through faith in Jesus Christ and practice baptism as a public sign of personal commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

**We are Bible-centered:** We accept the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, seeking to obey its teaching, as illumined by the Holy Spirit and interpreted in the Christian community.

**We emphasize discipleship:** We seek to live as authentic followers of Jesus in our daily lives, orienting our lives around Jesus’ teaching and model.

**We value Christian fellowship:** We believe the church is a biblical and mutually loyal community that expresses itself in worship, fellowship, accountability and witness.

**We are mission-minded:** We share our faith by telling others about the good news of Jesus and serving others in our neighborhoods and around the world, in obedience to Jesus’ Great Commandment and to the Great Commission.

**We seek peace:** We believe the Bible invites us to be at peace with God and with others, even our enemies.

**We cultivate healthy relationships:** We are committed to choices that produce wholeness, healing, joy and peace in all relationships.

A full copy of our Confession of Faith is available at the U.S. Conference Web site  
[www.usmb.org](http://www.usmb.org)

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# Faith Life

Pamphlet Series

## What We Believe



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Our understanding of God comes from the Bible. We believe that Jesus calls the people of the church to live in community (being), to serve God and others (doing) and to communicate to the world that God reigns over everything (telling). Our Mennonite Brethren beliefs can be condensed into these three ideas.

## Guided By The Bible

Mennonite Brethren seek to think and live biblically. We commit to believing, studying and obeying the Bible as our trustworthy and final authority (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Our confession of faith states what we believe the Bible has to say about living in our world today. As a biblical people, we commit to resolving questions about God and how we are to live by asking “What does the Bible say?” and “How do we apply Scripture so that it guides how we live in today’s world?”

We seek to allow the Bible itself to guide us in our understanding of God. We believe we should always go to Scripture for answers to questions about God, rather than to human systems such as systematic, evangelical or Anabaptist theologies. These may not accurately or adequately reflect a biblical theology. We seek to avoid using any single verse in a way that puts it above the rest of what the Bible says about a particular issue; this is called proof-texting and can distort what the Bible means to say.

At the same time, we recognize the priority of Jesus’ teaching. When we read the Bible, we use Christ’s teachings as the first lens for reading other Scripture. We want to know what Jesus said or taught about something, believing that, as God in human form, we should look to him first for a correct understanding of Scripture. Our progression is to read the Gospels through the lens of the Sermon on the Mount, the rest of the New Testament through the lens of the Gospels and the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament.

Our desire is to follow the pattern of the early church in answering questions about their faith. As these early Christians discerned God’s will together at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, we gather to study God’s Word together and discern his will for us in our modern world. We don’t interpret the Bible in isolation. We do it within the community of faith. The early church gathered together and evaluated the apostolic testimony of Paul, Barnabas and Peter; so we gather together to discern the biblical text and how its authority guides our lives. We try to interpret the Bible in this way within a worldwide community of faith guided by the Holy Spirit.

## Other Influences

Though our primary authority for faith and life is the Bible, a number of different faithful Christ followers have influenced us. When our church formed in 1860, the first members expressed their agreement with Menno Simons, a pastor and Christ follower of the 16th century. They were also influenced by the Lutheran pietist movement with its emphasis on

- < group Bible study,
- < warm Spirit-filled faith growing out of personal conversion,
- < thoughtful spirituality nurtured by disciplined Bible study and
- < a desire and commitment to tell others about Jesus, his good news of salvation and peace with God.



Through the years these words have taken on different meanings or associations depending on how our culture has experienced them. Some find the labels positive and helpful. Others prefer to avoid them. We use them to identify the biblical perspectives that we affirm.

Although their current meanings overlap to some degree, what follows is a summary of what we have taken from each tradition—both evangelical and Anabaptist.

## Evangelical Understandings

The word “evangel” itself means gospel or good news. It relates to the good news of Jesus Christ.

“Two labels have been used to describe our community’s understanding of Scripture: evangelical and Anabaptist.”

The following emphases of evangelical faith describe some of the good news that we affirm. Individual Christians experience spiritual birth

through choosing to enter a trust-follow relationship with Jesus Christ (John 3:3; Acts 16:31; Matt. 16:24). This new status and relationship with God is made through faith in Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross and his victorious resurrection (John 3:16-18; Rom. 3:19-26; Eph. 2:8-9).

The authority for our understanding of God is the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Maturity as a Christ-follower is nurtured through relational and personal spiritual disciplines (1 Tim. 4:8). The purpose of the church is to point people to Jesus and to call others to join us in this new life he provides (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). We believe that our purpose as God’s church is to engage our culture, transforming it as we pursue Christ’s mission and cooperate with other like-minded Christians.

Mennonite Brethren were also open to influences from the larger evangelical church, especially Baptists, who encouraged world missions and helped the young Mennonite Brethren church develop its congregational polity. This openness to other evangelical churches continued in North America in the 20th century and still characterizes Mennonite Brethren today.

Even though we claim the Bible as our source of understanding about God, we recognize that other Christians also claim that the Bible is the source of their distinctive beliefs. Within our community’s historical faith, we guard against nonbiblical influences that might distort what we believe. Two labels have been used to describe our community’s understanding of Scripture: evangelical and Anabaptist. Both words have origins in particular historical movements.