

Mennonite dating service: An online adventure

by [Kira Cunningham](#) in the [September 9, 2008](#) issue

A few months ago, I discovered a Mennonite online dating service: MennoMeet (a friend asked, “MennoMeet or MennoMeat?”). It’s a members-only network, so to participate you have to apply. Nervous about online dating in the first place, I liked the idea of starting with the familiar and comfortable world of my Mennonite faith background. Anyway, I reasoned, wouldn’t a Menno chap be just the kind of partner I’m looking for? After weeks of fighting the idea of dating online, I finally began the application process. I was surprised at how quickly insecurity about my religious identity reared up. Am I really Mennonite enough for a Mennonite dating service?

Among the profile’s blanks to fill:

Hometown. A seemingly benign query, it’s the first test to determine if I am truly a Mennonite. The Mennonite community is traditionally rooted in hometown families. If you are a Mennonite, your hometown can signal your place on the liberal-conservative spectrum, your possible economic level and the people you’d know by name. I, however, have lived in at least 12 places. What do I put down? My favorite Mennonite hometown? A list of the Mennonite towns I’ve lived in? An extensive list of all the locations in the U.S. and abroad that I’ve called home? Already I feel I’ve failed the authenticity test.

How active are you in the Mennonite Church? For a faith-based online dating service, this is a perfectly reasonable question. Knowing also how ambivalent some of my generation are about their Mennonite faith, I imagine it’s a way to discern active believers from those merely claiming a Mennonite cultural identity. But as a way to identify active faith the question is a tricky one. I live two hours from the nearest Mennonite church, and I don’t attend every Sunday. But I don’t consider myself inactive religiously. Being Mennonite is a crucial part of who I am.

Favorite aspect of the Mennonite faith. In responding to this, I’m faced with questions that have nagged at me for several years: I’m not convinced that the

aspects of the Mennonite faith that I hold most dear (simplicity, community support and accountability, the peace church stance, service) are necessarily Mennonite truths across the country. The Mennonite world ranges from very conservative to quite liberal. Is this a question of my place on the liberal-conservative spectrum or of my belief in Mennonite pillars of faith?

Three food items that best represent Mennonites for you. How about that to prove my authenticity? If I were a Mennonite of Russian descent from Kansas, I might say zweiback or borscht. I could identify myself by mentioning homemade noodles, mashed potatoes and lots of meat. What about the Jello with marshmallows common at church potlucks? Or the famous Oakieburger that would place me as a member of Oak Grove Mennonite Church?

What is your interpretation of the Schleithem Confession? Now I'm out of my league. What is this, a church history quiz? I actually had to Google this phrase. Anabaptists.org gives the full text of this early statement of Anabaptism. *My interpretation?* I'm trying to think of a church historian I can call.

The fact is that church identity—even one so solid both culturally and religiously as the Mennonite identity—is fluid. It's hard not to read between the lines and wonder what idealized version of Mennonites lurks behind each question. After a week of sitting with these questions and getting past both amusement and annoyance with them, I've actually found myself enjoying the challenge of putting into words both my faith and my wishes for a potential partner. I can't wait to ask my next date for his interpretation of the Schleithem Confession.