

## Notes from Pastor Don:

This week I would like to give a concise answer to the question, *“Why is the word Mennonite in our church name?”*

Our church is now 114 years old and has always been called West Zion Mennonite Church, so part of the reason is that we have never heard a convincing argument to change the name. I don't know what kinds of images come to your mind when you hear the name Mennonite, but essentially Mennonites have always held to these important distinctives:

**1. The importance of every individual making a decision to trust Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.** One of the early leaders of the Mennonite Church (Menno Simons, hence the name Mennonite), at a time when most believed that one is a Christian by being born into a Christian nation, Menno and other church leaders taught from the Bible that salvation is a gift that every individual must receive or reject by choosing to trust in Jesus. Therefore Menno Simons and other leaders rejected infant baptism, and instead stressed believer's baptism. Believer's baptism is the belief that one should only be baptized when he or she is old enough to understand what it means to trust in Jesus and that baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality. Without the inward reality, baptism is just a religious practice that accomplishes nothing.

**2. The separation of church and government.** In other words, the government shouldn't use their authority to threaten people into believing or rejecting Christ, this decision must be left to each individual.

**3. Equality for every individual regardless of nationality, gender or status.** Mennonites stressed this at a time (the sixteenth century) when women, the poor and the uneducated were consistently treated like second-class citizens.

**4. The refusal to use force to exact penalty on those who didn't agree with you.**

Mennonites believed that we should follow Jesus' teaching which says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The Mennonites taught this at a time when sadly, Christians were using military force to kill other Christians who didn't agree with them on certain points of doctrine.

I didn't personally grow up in a Mennonite church or even attend a Mennonite school, but I'm thankful for these distinctives that the Mennonites have sacrificed for. These distinctives have had a positive impact on other churches and schools that I have attended and pastored. The only reason that we would ever consider changing the name is because of the false perceptions that some people have, and admittedly, some Mennonites have earned. I hope that this article has cleared up some of those misperceptions and answered the question of why after 114 years “Mennonite” is still part of our name.