

Declaration by Robert B. Alexander

I, Robert B. Alexander, do certify and state:

My name is Robert Alexander. I am 55 years old and a member of the Old Order Amish church. My wife and I live on an 86-acre farm near Coral in west central Michigan. We have been farming in Michigan since 1977, except for a few years when we lived out of state. We have always been in the dairy or beef business, as well as hogs, poultry and most other livestock. We make our entire living on our farm, as do most members of our community and neighboring communities. I am also a free-lance writer, with work appearing in several nationally-distributed periodicals and books. During our few years out-of-state, I was on the editorial staff at Pathway Publishers, an Amish publishing house.

An Overview of the Amish

The beginning of our church goes back to the earliest days of the Reformation. Our forefathers broke from the other Reformers in 1525 and were considered the radical left wing of the Reformation. A century and a half of the most violent persecution followed, during which time a remnant survived by living at the very edge of society in the mountains of Switzerland and South Germany. That legacy of separation from the affairs of the world is still with us today, and our lifestyle remains entirely rural and deliberately separated.

By 1693 the Amish church emerged as a separate group within the broader Anabaptist movement. The other two branches are the Mennonites and the Hutterites, both of which are found especially in rural areas across the US and Canada. By 1693 the era of violent persecution was about over, and our people were able to live more openly, mostly in South Germany and Alsace. Milder forms of persecution continued though. Much like the Jews of eastern Europe, the Amish were highly valued for their skills, and survived only under the toleration of sometimes-fickle petty nobles. They were not normally able to purchase land, and made their living by farming on estates rented from the nobility. Other strong restrictions applied to areas of social life and

freedom of movement. It was a constant struggle to remain out of military service. Following an invitation by William Penn, the first Mennonites arrived in Pennsylvania about 1711, and the first Amish soon afterward. The main reasons for immigration were the promises of freedom of worship and freedom from military conscription, and the freedom to farm their own land. Immigration continued in several waves through the 1850s. All of the Amish and Hutterites, and most of the Mennonites, completely disappeared from Europe after this period, due to increasing intolerance toward their principle of separation, and their somewhat forced integration into European society.

Already by the end of the 18th century, the Amish name was used in Europe as a synonym for "good farmer", in much the same way that it is used today as a symbol of quality. While scorned for their religion, they were admired for their inovative farming practices, including manuring, crop rotation, cover cropping and other practices that would today be called "organic" farming. We have continued this tradition down to the present.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Amish numbered about 5,000. Scholars were predicting that the Amish were headed for extinction within a few decades, due to their undesireably simple lifestyle. We didn't listen. Today the Amish population is nearing a quarter million, and we are doubling every twenty years. This is partly due to a high birthrate, but also due to a surprisingly high retention rate, contrary to what is seen on TV. Apparently our simple lifestyle is now desireable! There are perhaps 26,000 families in about 1300 churches, in maybe 250 settlements scattered across 27 states. No one knows for sure, partly because it changes so fast, and partly because of our aversion to counting people and keeping records of them all. It must seem strange that a quarter million people can be happy, healthy, prosperous and free without being recorded, chipped and tracked!

Michigan has the fifth highest Amish population, just behind Wisconsin, and far behind the big three of PA, OH and IN. We may be switching positions with WI, as many, many families have left that state in the last 3 years due to mandatory premissis ID. But

then again, Michigan is poised for the same disruptive emmigration. Michigan has about 1350 Amish households in 63 church districts in 31 communities, with a total population of about 8,000. Of these, about 570, or 42%, are farmers or retired farmers, living on more than 500 farms.

Our importance in the farming community across the state and region is far out of proportion to our total population in the state. For example, most of the farmers are small dairymen. We could easily be 25% of the dairy farmers in the state (that figure is close), though we of course produce far from 25% of the milk. We are locally very important to the economies of small towns. I have heard comments that we don't buy cars, appliances or a lot of gas from local merchants, which is true. But ask the local feed store, livestock trucker, sale barn, logger, hardware or bulk grocery store, and you will get a different picture. A recent article in the Grand Rapids Press on the NAIS issue stated that "not all Amish raise cattle, but those who do typically have herds of 8-10 animals", and MDA's Kevin Kirk went on to dismiss our output as "very, very small". I don't know where the 8-10 figure came from, but most Amish milking herds are 10-25 cows. In addition, many calves and heifers are raised as replacements or as a separate sideline. Most farms would have between 20 and 80 head of cattle, in addition to a dizzying array of other livestock. In addition, most of the other 800 non-farming families live on rural acreage, and most have a number of types of livestock which are raised at non-commercial levels. In other words, the 500 farming families have non-farm sidelines, and the 800 non-farming families often have farm sidelines. Of course, literally all families own horses for work and transportation, totalling perhaps 5700 head. In addition to these numbers, there are numerous other non-Amish Plain churches across the Midwest, many of whom share our convictions and our simple rural lifestyle.

The more conservative communities, of which ours is one, have the highest percentage of farmers, perhaps 75%. And most of the rest are either will-be farmers, often newlyweds, or has-been farmers, retired but living in the small house alongside their farming children. But even in communities with a lower percentage,

the farmers are the backbone, with most other families conforming to the general pattern of farm life. It is rare to be involved in an occupation that sets one apart from the community. Our church rules do not allow working at a regular job except in small Amish enterprises. Mennonite author Donald Kraybill says, "The Amish have always been a people of the land. Ever since persecution in Europe pushed them to rural isolation, they have been tillers of the soil- and good ones. The land has nurtured their common life. ... They have tenaciously clung to the soil and have purchased more of it whenever possible. 'Agriculture,' according to one leader, 'is a religious tenet, a branch of Christian duty.' The divine injunction to Adam in Genesis 'to till the ground from which he came' provides a religious mandate for farming. The Amish believe the Bible instructs them to earn their living by the sweat of their brow. Tilling it ushers them into the presence of God. 'I don't know what will happen if we get away from the soil,' a young farmer said. 'I can see where it's not a very good thing. You get away from working with the soil and you get away from nature and then you are getting away from the Lord's handiwork.' ... Although the Amish delight in working in it, the soil is not an end in itself; it is the seedbed for Amish families. A persistent theme, extolled by virtually all Amish elders, praises the farm as the best place to raise a family... Farms provide a habitat for raising sturdy families. Parents and children worked together. Daily chores taught children personal responsibility and the virtue of hard work. Parents were always nearby- directing, supervising, advising or reprimanding. Pitted against the forces of nature, families forged a strong sense of identity and cohesion. Moreover the demands of farm work kept young people at home and limited interaction with the outside world. The family farm was the cradle of Amish socialization."

Each Amish community sets its own rules, and the variations are endless, though you might not notice the differences from the outside. The ministers and leaders are chosen from the ranks, and decisions are made by a form of consensus. The rules governing each congregation are called the Ordnung (or, Order in English). There is normally a written portion of varying length, which is

sort of a charter upon whose rules the community was founded, followed by a much longer oral portion. Part of this oral portion consists of decisions which were made after the community was founded, which aren't written down because almost everybody heard it, and a much larger portion which is traditions which are so obvious to everyone that it is never even discussed, much less written down. For example, the Ordnung does not specifically mention that we don't have cars, helicopters, electricity, computers or electronic ID. These things are so far from our collective minds that writing them down would seem insulting to our intelligence, as well as a waste of time and paper. Because of the consensual nature of the rules, each member has a stake in them and conformity is generally good. If someone finds himself seriously not-in-favor of something, they are free to move to another community, and they frequently do.

The Ordnung of the church is far-reaching, and as one might expect, it reaches furthest into areas of potential conflict. Talented leaders try to see trends before they become problems. Many areas of the Ordnung are designed to head off potential problems before they arise, or to contain them when they are still small. Bishop Elmo Stoll wrote, "It should be understood that no plain church, to my knowledge, claims their Ordnung to be the only correct one. Let us look at it like this. We all agree we need to be separate in order to maintain a scriptural difference from the world. But how different? Where shall we draw the line?... Not everyone arrives at the exact same answer. But generally, the farther downstream we go to build the dam, the harder the force of the current, and the more work and effort to resist it." We see NAIS as a fast-rushing stream, soon to become a large river!

Amish life is inseparable from Amish religion. Kraybill says, "The scant specialization and rationalization in Amish life means that religion itself is not viewed as a separate entity to be studied or taught in school or in any other setting. Typical of more primitive societies, religion permeates all levels and dimensions of Amish culture. It is never taught in a formal fashion. In the words of one Amishman, 'Cur religion is insepar-

able with a day's work, a night's rest, a meal, or any other practice.' By contrast, modern religion is often relegated to special hours, facilities, objects and officials."

Chief Justice Burger wrote in WI vs Yoder, "The history of the Amish sect was given in some detail, beginning with the Swiss Anabaptists of the 16th century, who rejected institutionalized churches and sought to return to the early, simple, Christian life deemphasizing material success, rejecting the competitive spirit, and seeking to insulate themselves from the modern world. As a result of their common heritage, Old Order Amish Communities today are characterized by a fundamental belief that salvation requires life in a church community separate and apart from the world and worldly influences. This concept of life aloof from the world and its values is central to their faith. A related feature of Old Order Amish communities is their devotion to a life in harmony with nature and the soil, as exemplified by the simple life of the early Christian era that continued in America during much of our early national life. Amish belief requires members of the community to make their living by farming or closely related activities. Broadly speaking, the Old Order Amish religion pervades and determines the entire mode of life of its adherents."

Our separation from the world is as complete as we can make it within the context of modern society. It is far more than symbolic. We do not partake in Social Security, private insurance, voting, unions, the stock market, photo IDs, political office, nor any other entanglements. This goes far beyond the obvious outward manifestations of our lifestyle, such as dress and transportation. Kraybill writes, "The Amish fear of worldliness is rooted in a spiritual concern to preserve the purity of the church. The drama between church and world is a battle between good and evil, between the forces of righteousness and those of the devil. It is the ultimate struggle, and to succumb to worldliness is to surrender the community to apostacy. This key unlocks many of the riddles in Amish society. The impulse to separate from the world infuses Amish consciousness, guides personal behavior, and shapes institutional structures. The sectarian suspicion of the world confounds Moderns, who are enchanted by inclusivity, acceptance, diversity

and religious pluralism. If social separation is indeed a byproduct of technological progress, the Amish believe they can only preserve their community by separating from the Great Separator, modernity itself."

In a similar vein, Bishop Elmo Stoll wrote, " But there are enemies around us, not enemies to us as persons, but enemies to the values we love... There is only one way to remain different from the world, and that is to be separate. There is no way we can mingle freely and unrestrictedly with people who hold different values, and not be influenced by that mingling." The Bible also tells us "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." II Cor 6:17, and again, that we are to be "in the world" but not "of the world" Jn 17:14,15. And also, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Js 1:27.

In the book "1001 Q&A on the Christian Life", I once wrote, "How does our Christian faith shape and influence our way of life? In many ways. For instance the desire to live in a rural setting. ... What are some of the advantages of rural life?... Only by living in the country is it possible to farm, which we consider the most ideal occupation for Christian families. This is not to say that everyone must be a farmer, only that it is the most ideal. In what way is it ideal? Farming allows us to be part of the cycle of life, death and renewal that God planned in his wisdom. In our daily contact with creation, we cannot help but stand in awe and wonder of God. Are there other reasons? The Christian father belongs at home with his family. On the farm, we have the opportunity to work together as a family. The lines of 'your work' and 'my work' become blurred so that it becomes 'our work'. There are always tasks for the children, and they grow up knowing how to work and to accept responsibility... Is there a reason to farm so old-fashioned? A number of reasons, the main one being to limit the size of our operation. The worldly philosophy claims 'bigger is better'. Instead it has driven many farmers to bankruptcy and saddled the rest with a work-load and a debt-load that is not healthy to bear. We prefer to farm in a smaller way so there is less risk and a lower

investment. What are some of the other reasons? One reason for encouraging agriculture is to provide work for all members of the family, including the young. Using all the labor-saving machinery would defeat this purpose. Also, large-scale farming is likely to conflict with the 'quiet and peaceable life' of which Paul writes (I Tim 2:2; II Thes 3:12). Nor is it spiritually advisable to earn a large income or to control excessively-large assets (see Luke 12:15-21 and 16:19-30). Large-scale farming also tends toward self-sufficiency. Isn't self sufficiency a virtue? In the sense of less reliance on the things of the world, yes indeed. But we mean here an independant attitude of 'I don't need others.' In the Christian community, it is right to be neighborly and to work together helping each other. With small-scale farming, neighbors help each other do the work that modern farmers each do alone with their big machinery. Would this hold true for other technology as well? Usually. It is not that the Plain people oppose all new ideas and practices. There is a need to choose only those that will be of genuine benefit, and to reject those that break down the values we uphold. This would apply to modern appliances and household gadgets, many of which have the potential to change our family- and community-oriented way of life in ways we may not realize until the damage has been done."

Mennonite scholar John A. Hostetler wrote, " The Amish have made some adaptations to modernization, but they will not allow technology and convenience to run away with their family and community." The Amish magazine Family Life often discusses the principle of separation in our way of living and farming, including the following 3 quotations. David Wagler wrote, "It's the responsibility of the church to decide if something is detrimental to the church. If we feel it is, we must take our stand against it the same as we do against such things as TV... We ought to take a critical look before accepting every new invention that comes along. In the long run, how will affect the family färm? Will it help to make more use of horsepower and family labor on the farm? Will it encourage working together as a family unit and as a community, to help each other?" I added the following, "That the farm economy in general is a hard place these days is plain to

