

Hutterites

The Hutterian Brethren (commonly known as the Hutterites) are a traditional Christian sect, settled in many agricultural colonies across the Great Plains of the United States and Canada. Approximately 36,000 members live and work communally in about 428 collective farms, or *Bruderhöfe*.

The Hutterian movement began in 1528, when an Anabaptist sect in Austerlitz, Moravia (now the Czech Republic), adopted communal living, rejected the sanctioned practice of infant baptism, and renounced the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Severely persecuted for these heresies, the sect found its current name in 1536 when an early leader, Jakob Hutter, was burned at the stake.

After more than 300 years of persecution and forced migration in Eastern Europe and Russia, the Hutterites fled to the American Dakota Territory between 1874 and 1877. However, they were again persecuted in the United States during World War I, due to their strict pacifism and Germanic ethnicity, and all but one colony migrated to Canada in 1918. While many colonies remain in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia today, others have returned to or have been founded in the United States. These are primarily located in South Dakota and Montana, but may also be found in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Washington.

Daily life in Hutterian colonies revolves around religion, as Hutterites attend services every evening and twice on Sunday. Their spiritual beliefs discourage selfish interests and emphasize serving the communal good. The tenet of *Gelassenheit* – or “self-surrender” – entails a rejection of material luxury and personal wealth. Modeling themselves after the early Christians (see Acts 2: 44-47), the Hutterites practice communal ownership of land and other goods. While individual families live in private apartments, each colony holds all possessions and money in a common trust. Hutterites eat and work collectively, receiving no individual salary but sharing equally in the

proceeds of their labor. The colony provides for all basic necessities, such as medical costs, childcare, clothing, and furniture.

Hutterian colonies are located in sparsely populated areas to minimize interaction with the outside world and thus focus attention on spiritual goals. Like the well-known Amish and Mennonites (which are not communal), the Hutterites adhere to traditional dress, customs, and language. Unlike these other Germanic Anabaptist sects, the Hutterites employ modern technology and methods of agriculture and manufacturing.

Hutterites learn English, but use High German in religious services and informally speak a Tyrolean dialect, which they call *Hutterisch*. Children learn Hutterite traditions and history in a German-speaking classroom while also studying standard academic topics in a government-mandated school, which they call the "English" school. They are growing more open to conventional education and some Hutterite teenagers now earn high school diplomas.

Adolescents become adult members at age fifteen and may be eligible for baptism at age twenty. At this point, a Hutterite woman generally leaves her colony to marry a man in another colony, which receives a dowry in exchange. The Hutterites practice traditional gender roles and women cannot vote or hold colony office. As large families are encouraged, Hutterites have some of the highest birth rates of any ethnic or religious group in the United States, with an average of nine children per family. For this reason, the total number of Hutterites and Hutterian colonies rises steadily. When a colony grows too large (130-150 members), it splits and forms a "daughter" colony.

Some related traditional sects, such as the Bruderhof of New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, or non-agricultural colonies in Japan, England, and Paraguay, have grown out of the Hutterian movement. The Prarieleut are people of Hutterian descent who also settled in the Great Plains, but who do not live communally and often attend Mennonite churches.

Courtney Muir Wallner
Columbia University

James A. Kitts
Cornell University

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