

# MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

*Thank you for expressing an interest in membership at Soddy United Methodist Church! We believe God is doing something amazing in our church and are excited that he may be leading you to become an important part of it. You are asked to prayerfully read and review all this material, and if you feel God is calling you to make a commitment of membership to Soddy UMC, please contact the pastor or the church office.*

## **WHY MEMBERSHIP?**

One of the questions often asked is “Why should I become a member of the church? Can’t I participate in its worship, ministries and mission without being a member?” Yes, you can. You can take part in any of the church’s activities without having to be a member.

Membership in the United Methodist Church is a vow. It is a serious promise made before God and other members of the church. This vow is like the marriage vow. It is to be honored.

Two people in love can continue to date for an indefinite amount of time. But at some point in their relationship, the feelings deepen to the point they want to make a serious, permanent commitment to one another. So they get married and take marriage vows to honor, uphold, love, cherish and remain faithful to each other. Membership in the church is like that.

There is no limit on how long you might choose to “date” the church. But at some point God may call you to deepen that commitment. By choosing to become a member, you have stopped “dating” and have made a serious, permanent commitment.

If you are not yet ready to make that kind of vow, then full membership may not be right for you at this point. Continue to pray and seek God’s direction.

## **WHY SODDY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?**

Every community has a large number of churches to choose from. There are various theologies, ministries, styles of worship, and opportunities. Just as no two people are the same, no two churches are the same. Different churches and denominations appeal to different people.

If you are considering membership at Soddy United Methodist Church, you will be asked to take vows to the United Methodist Church. These will be explained shortly. You will also be agreeing to our form of church government, to our theology, to our structures and our work in the world.

We are seeking to grow and reach out to our surrounding neighbors. We focus on missions and outreach, encouraging all members to be involved in personal evangelism, service to others, and mission work. Our mission statement is “*Glorifying, Growing, Going For God*” (4G).

If you are uncertain about whether Soddy UMC is the right church for you to commit to, prayerfully take this before God. He will lead you to the church family he wants you to be part of.

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

So what exactly is the church? We all have our ideas and impressions of what the church is. But let's look at what Scripture tells us the church is and does.

God established the church to be the ongoing incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, the church (locally and universally) proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ, worships God, administers the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper), builds up the faithful, acts as "salt and light" (*Matthew 5:13-16*) in the world, meets needs within society, and provides an alternative community and way of life. The church is not a building; it is the *people of God*. It is not an organization; it is an *organism*. The church includes all those who have gone before (the church triumphant), those in the present time, and all those who will belong in the ages to come.

In Scripture the church is described as...

### **Body of Christ**

*Romans 12:4-5*

*1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 12:12-20, 27*

*Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:11-13, 16*

*Colossians 1:18*

### **The bride of Christ**

*Ephesians 5:25-28*

*Revelation 19:7; 21:9-10*

### **Holy temple**

*1 Corinthians 6:19*

*Ephesians 2:21*

### **Flock**

*Acts 20:28-29*

*1 Peter 5:2*

God's intent for the church can be found in *Ephesians 3:10* and *Colossians 1:15-23*. The church is to be the agent through which God in Christ reconciles all things to himself. The church's responsibility is to live differently, serve graciously, and love courageously.

The church...

- Is to be a unique, set-apart (sanctified) *community*
- Is to show the world how to live in the Kingdom of God (cf. *Matthew 5-7*)
- Is to present and represent Jesus Christ to the world
- Is to accomplish what no other person, group, or organization can
- Is to live "in the world" but not "of the world"
- Is to be counter-cultural
- Is a commitment to the reign and lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life
- Alive, growing, changing

The church IS NOT...

- A social club, country club, health club, or other membership-oriented group
- A group that requires no involvement or participation

- A business (although there are elements of business that must be used)
- Passive

## **WHO'S IN CHARGE?**

The Head of the church is Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, 5:23; Colossians 1:18*). Pastors serve to proclaim the Gospel, administer the sacraments, maintain the order of the church, and “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (*Ephesians 4:12*). Pastoral and church staff assist in these functions. Pastors represent the spiritual shepherd or leader that God has chosen/called to be over that particular church.

In the United Methodist Church, different committees, teams, and councils work together to further the mission and purpose of the church.

- The church’s central governing body is the Administrative Board or Church Council. It’s responsibilities include receiving reports from other ministry areas, voting on all issues pertaining to the life and work of the church, approving candidates for ministry, leading by example, and seeing to the overall management of the church.
- The Staff Parish Committee is the body that works with the pastor, staff, and congregation members to assure the mission and purpose of the church is being achieved.
- The Finance Committee is responsible for all financial matters in the local church.
- The Trustees attend to all issues, needs and maintenance related to the church grounds and facilities.
- Other committees and teams can be permanent (Outreach Ministries, Worship, etc.) or may be temporary, for a particular need or season.

## **WHAT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY?**

The role of the church member is to carry out the tasks/work of the church. This is done by full submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ, by active participation in the life of the church, and by the exercise of spiritual gifts. It is not the “pastor’s job” to do all the work of the church. This is an unbiblical structure that most churches have assumed. The role of the pastor is mentioned above: to train up the people (through preaching, teaching, leadership, etc.) to carry out the ministries of the church. It is the role of the laity—the church members—to fulfill the tasks of ministry.

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SERVING IN THE CHURCH**

You may or may not have heard of spiritual gifts before. If you have heard of them, you may at some point have taken a spiritual gifts inventory or “assessment.” You may have also heard about them because some churches and denominations abuse them or go overboard with them.

*Spiritual gifts are special dispensations [gifts] given by the Holy Spirit for building up the church.* They are used to encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ. They are not to be used to glorify or draw attention to ourselves. Spiritual gifts are identified in Scripture in *Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, and 1 Peter 4:10-11*. If you are called to become a member of

Soddy UMC, you will be asked to identify your spiritual gifts as part of your preparation for membership. This can be done with a hard copy inventory or at any of the spiritual gifts web sites online (search for “spiritual gifts assessment”).

The purpose of spiritual gifts are...

- To witness to Jesus Christ
- To build up the church
- To demonstrate God’s grace
- To praise God

Upon identifying one’s spiritual gift(s), church members should seek God’s direction to find an area of ministry in the church to exercise his/her gift(s). God gives spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit to provide what the church needs. There are many ways to serve and be actively involved in the life of the church. Contact any pastor or staff person to see what is available and what you are drawn to.

### **SPIRITUAL GIFTS...AND TALENTS...AND SKILLS**

A common question that is asked is, “How do spiritual gifts differ from talents or skills?”

**Spiritual gifts** are given by the Holy Spirit when one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They may change, depending on what God needs/wants done in a particular church. They are used for edifying and building up the church, not for personal promotion.

**Talents** are God-given abilities to do something well (painting, singing, working with the handicapped, writing, speaking, etc.). They may be improved over time with practice and experience.

**Skills** are learned behaviors. These can include anything that we are trained to do, such as computer programming, architecture, automotive repair, banking, etc. Like talents, our skills can be improved with time, practice, and experience. Many times talents and skills go hand-in-hand and are closely related to one another.

For example, someone may have a talent to draw and be artistic. Because of that, the person may choose to strengthen that talent by learning specific skills, in order to become a more accomplished artist. That person’s spiritual gifts, however, may have nothing to do with art.

## **THE VOWS OF MEMBERSHIP TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

As noted earlier, the vows of membership to the church are taken very seriously by God and need to be taken very seriously by those making them. In the United Methodist Church, there are five vows all new members are required to take. These are asked by the pastor as the new members are standing in front of the church.

### **I. THE VOW OF PRAYER**

The pastor will ask, “(Name), will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church and uphold it with you PRAYERS—for its leadership, for your brothers & sisters in Christ, and for the church’s work and witness in the world?”

The person(s) respond aloud, “I will.”

Prayer is the life force of the Christian and of the church. Martin Luther King Jr. said to be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. A vital,

healthy prayer life is non-negotiable. If the church is to accomplish its mission and purpose in the world, then every member **MUST** prayer regularly and sincerely.

## **II. THE VOW OF PRESENCE**

The pastor will ask, **“Will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church and uphold it with your PRESENCE—by faithfully participating in its corporate worship, in its activities, and in its mission to the world?”**

The person(s) respond aloud, **“I will.”**

There is an old joke about three pastors--a Methodist, a Baptist, and a Presbyterian--who were eating lunch one day. The Presbyterian remarked that his church had a problem with bats in the ceiling, so they called in an exterminator. The exterminator sprayed and killed off the bats but shortly thereafter more bats returned. The Baptist pastor said his church had the same exact problem. They tried to resolve it by repairing the roof but the bats kept getting in. The Methodist pastor smiled and said his church had the same problem.

“What did you do?” the other two pastors asked.

“Oh, it was simple, really,” the Methodist pastor responded. “We simply made all the bats members of the church and we haven’t seen them since!”

This is *NOT* what we want happening at Soddy UMC! Growth in discipleship, opportunities for service and ministry, and worship God are all vital for every Christian. If you desire to be a member of the church, your active involvement is expected.

## **III. THE VOW OF GIFTS**

The pastor will ask, **“Will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church and uphold it with your GIFTS—those of time, talents, and financial resources?”**

The person(s) respond aloud, **“I will.”**

Financial giving is important in the life of every Christian—not because the church “needs money,” but because giving (or tithing, if you prefer) is a spiritual issue. What we do with our financial resources, what we think about them, how we use them, tells a lot about our spiritual condition. Monies given to the church regularly help the church to be able to function and fulfill its mission and purpose in the world. Every member should follow the instructions of Paul: *“Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). What you choose to give is between you and God. But this area of discipleship should be given careful prayer consideration. And remember that giving is an act of worship toward the One who has given us all things.

But our “gifts” aren’t just financial. Church members are expected to share their time and talents with and through the local church. This is part of our ongoing growth in discipleship, our service to and for others, and part of a lifestyle of outreach and love. Allow God to your talents to help build up the church and reach others for Jesus Christ.

## **IV. THE VOW OF SERVICE**

The pastor will ask, **“Will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church and uphold it with your SERVICE—by finding ways to serve in faithful action so that Jesus Christ may be known and glorified?”**

The person(s) respond aloud, **“I will.”**

Every member at Soddy UMC is expected to be in service to other people: in the church, in the community, around the world. This might be something as simple as helping out in a worship service by reading scripture, or providing a covered dish for a bereavement dinner. It might involve volunteering with the Hispanic ministry, helping out in various areas of the church, or giving time to a ministry organization in our area (Good Samaritan Ministries in Johnson City, etc.)

The loving, no-strings-attached service we do on behalf of others is a powerful witness to the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Most churches today are filled with people who practice “consumer Christianity,” that is, they take and take and take and rarely give anything back. Church membership is not about “What do I get out of it?” but rather “What do I put INTO it?” The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs more Christians who are willing to live out their faith in positive, affirming, transforming actions for the betterment of others.

## **V. THE VOW OF WITNESS**

The pastor will ask, **“Will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church through your witness—so that your words, your actions, and your life reflect the saving grace of Jesus Christ?”**

The person(s) respond aloud, **“I will.”**

This vow essentially pulls together all the prior vows. By affirming this vow, you are making a statement of lifestyle. You are promising to live out, every day, in word and deed, your commitment to Jesus Christ.

Too many people in today’s world have a negative impression of Christianity. They like and appreciate Jesus, but they have had too many bad experiences with Christians. This is because for far too long Christians have not lived out the core message of Jesus. We have argued and judged and condemned and thought ourselves better than others. Well, the time has come for us to stop talking about Christianity and start living it out. People don’t want words. They want actions.

## **BECOMING A MEMBER**

The decision to become a member of Soddy UMC should not be made lightly or hurriedly. There should be a strong investment of prayer in the process, along with family discussions on the expectations and commitments of membership. Trust that God will place you where He wants you to be. If that is at Soddy UMC, we will celebrate with you and lovingly welcome you into our fellowship! If God leads you elsewhere, we respect that and believe in God’s plan for you.

**Before joining, you will be expected to do several things:**

- (1) Prayerfully believe that God has called you to membership at Soddy UMC;**
- (2) Identify your spiritual gifts;**
- (3) Attend a new membership class;**
- (4) Prayerfully decide on how God is calling you to invest financially in helping to meet the missional needs of the church;**
- (5) Have attended and participated regularly in the life of the congregation;**

## **FOR UNITED METHODISTS**

If you are currently a member of another United Methodist Church, you may transfer your membership from that church to Soddy UMC. You will be asked to publicly renew your vows to The United Methodist Church.

The question is sometimes asked, “I’ve been a United Methodist for a long time. Do I still need to participate in the new membership class?” The answer is *yes*. Many people have been members of a United Methodist Church for long periods of time but still know very little about the church’s history, theology, mission or purpose. This class can make a very good “refresher” for anyone.

## **FOR OTHER DENOMINATIONS**

If you are a member of another Christian denomination, you will be asked to publicly take vows to The United Methodist Church. If you have not been baptized in that denomination, we will perform this sacrament when you come before the church to join. The United Methodist Church recognizes all baptisms performed by legitimate Christian denominations.

## **IF YOU HAVE NEVER JOINED A CHURCH**

If you have never held a membership in any church, you will be brought into membership by a public Profession of Faith, and you will be asked to publicly take vows to The United Methodist Church. The Profession of Faith can be found on pages 34-35, 38 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. If you have never been baptized, we will perform this sacrament when you come before the church to join.

## **LOTS OF RESPONSIBILITY!**

As you can tell, being a member of the church carries with it a lot of responsibilities! That’s because the church is the visible presence of Jesus Christ in the world, and we should strive to make the best and most significant impression possible. God takes our vows of membership seriously—just as he does our vows of marriage. The church should do no less.

It is likely you have several questions by this point. Please feel free to contact the pastor and discuss them over the phone, or schedule a time to meet together.

Our goal is not to simply add more names to our membership roll. We are not just looking for hands to give more money. We don’t need more uncommitted people sitting in the pews. We desire that our church members live out the passionate call to love and serve Jesus Christ in every area of their lives. We pray God will speak to you and lead you to the exact church home he has for you. If it is Soddy UMC, we can’t wait to welcome you home!

**GLORIFYING • GROWING • GOING FOR GOD**