

Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, Witness

Membership Vows

Persons who join The United Methodist Church make sacred commitments to God and to the community and promise to be held accountable to their commitments. Through these vows we accept God's free gift of freedom and power to turn away from evil; to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to believe in the Christian faith as contained in the Bible; to live a Christian life; and to

*faithfully participate in the ministries
of the church*

*by our prayers, our presence, our gifts,
our service, and our witness,
that in everything God may be glorified
through Jesus Christ.*

(“New Membership Vows and Ritual” © 2008 by
The General Board of Discipleship of The United
Methodist Church)

Prayers

There is not one right way to pray. We speak the Lord's Prayer together, and we are one with millions of Christians throughout history who have opened to the mystery of God's grace through those words. But we are also one with ages of Christians when in distress we cry a silent *Help!* to God, when we wait in stillness for God's guidance, when we shout our anger at injustice, and when we take action to right wrongs and reach out in compassion to a hurting world. All of this is prayer.

Our vow of prayer calls us to employ the power of prayer as the foundation of our lifelong journey to become like Christ—as individuals and as the body of Christ. Our faithful response to God's love through Christ is to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide our words, our work, and our ministry.

Presence

When we are doing something we love, a hobby or a sport, we give it all of our attention and we are engaged and focused—we are fully present. That's the nature of our vow to give the church our presence. We promise to give the life, work, and ministry of the church our full attention; to listen actively; to participate with enthusiasm; and to offer our joy, creativity, skill, talents, and gifts to help the congregation become more like Christ. When we are fully present, we connect with others in ways that deepen community and grow our faith.

Our vow of presence does not mean saying yes to every request for service or taking on tasks and roles that we cannot do. It does mean offering our time and energy in large and small ways that help us grow spiritually and that add value to the congregation, the community, and the world. Our vow of presence does not stop at the door of the church building. We are the body of Christ in and for the world. We are called to be fully engaged and focused on God in all aspects of our lives—work, play, relationships, and ministry.

Gifts

When we have chosen the perfect gift for a loved one—often something personal—we get as much joy in the giving as the loved one does in receiving. A bond of true affection is deepened by a thoughtful gift given with love. Think about our vow to faithfully participate by our gifts in this way. It is more about growing a generous spirit than about actual gifts of time, money, talent, skill, or spiritual power. Our vow calls us to open to the presence of God within and among us; to accept the free gift of God's love through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; and, with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, to joyfully share our gifts with others.

Because we are all unique, our gifts of love vary widely. You may hear people talk about *tithing*, giving ten percent of our income to support the work of the church, but the size or amount of a gift is never as important as the spirit of the giver

(see Exodus 35:20-29; 2 Corinthians 9:7). Gifts of generosity, given freely with joy and hope, are avenues of God's love that contribute to the spiritual growth of the giver and help build up the body of Christ and transform the world.

When we vow to give our gifts, we promise to share the love, power, and freedom of God with whoever has need.

Service

All of our membership vows are related. When we are faithful in prayer and fully present to God and one another, we will be moved to generosity in sharing the joy of God's love with others. Our vow of service is an extension of that sharing. Service within and beyond the congregation—in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, communities, and around the globe—is the evidence of God's love and power at work within us. We do not serve because we have to; we serve in response to God's abundant love that overflows our joyful hearts.

When we take the vow of service in The United Methodist Church, we join a proud tradition and long history of faithful, selfless ministry through education, healing, preaching, addressing social injustice, and caring for and with the poor and marginalized. Our Holy Communion service reminds us that by the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are “one with Christ, / one with each other, / and one in ministry to all the world” (from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, copyright 1989 by The United Methodist Publishing House).

God calls us in love; fills us with power, joy, and strength; and sends us out to be the body of Christ in, for, and with the hurting world. Fulfilling our vow of service is God's love in action.

Witness

In a courtroom, witnesses are expected to offer faithful accounts of an event. In the family of Christ, we have seen and experienced the

transforming love of God in Christ. Our witness to the world is to offer a faithful account of the truth we know, the freedom and power of God's love to change the world. Our witness shines in the way we live our daily lives, and in how we share the story of God's love—the good news of Jesus Christ—with a hungry and hurting world.

Witness is as old as the Christian faith. The life of Jesus of Nazareth provides the perfect example of faithful witness to the love of God. We are not perfect, but our vow calls us to enter the struggle together to become like Christ.

As with the vow of service, faithful witness is the outward sign of the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through us. It is as if we are filled with light and have no choice but to shine. Witness grows through prayers and presence; it is nurtured by our gifts of generosity and spirit; it fills our service with joy. We are all one in Christ, and we are all called to grow in God's love and to share it with others. Our true witness in the world is the fruit of the Spirit, the ways we actively live out "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Learn more about it . . .

To learn more about membership in The United Methodist Church, speak to a United Methodist pastor or:

- Go to <http://umc.org>, the official website of The United Methodist Church, or <http://gbod.org/worship>, the worship website of The General Board of Discipleship, and enter *membership vows* in the search window.
- Read *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* by Rueben P. Job (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), and *The "Unofficial" United Methodist Handbook* by F. Belton Joyner Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), available at 1-800-672-1789, <http://www.cokesbury.com>, or at your local Cokesbury store.

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ISBN-13: 978-1-4267-1152-7



Membership and United Methodists

