

# Membership: Frequently Asked Questions<sup>1</sup>

**Q:** *As an adult, how do I become a member of the United Methodist Church?*<sup>2</sup>

**A:** Here are the various ways:

- If you have never been baptized, you will prepare for baptism.
- If you were baptized as an infant or young child and have not made a profession of faith and been confirmed, then you will prepare to reaffirm your baptism when you take the membership vows.
- If you are a member of another part of the church (such as Baptist, Presbyterian or Lutheran), then you can transfer your membership from that church to a local United Methodist Church.
- If you are a member of another Christian church that does not transfer membership, you can make a profession of faith and be received as a member.

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**Q:** *Does baptism make me a member of the church?*

**A:** Yes, baptism is the act of initiation and incorporation into the universal church of Jesus Christ, The United Methodist Church, and the local congregation, as our ritual makes very clear.

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**Q:** *Is there more than one category of church membership, according to By Water and the Spirit?*

**A:** Yes, all people who are baptized become baptized members. Those who are baptized at an age at which they are capable of professing their faith must do so and become professing members as well (they cannot choose to be baptized members only). Those baptized as infants or young children do not become professing members until they are able to profess their own faith, usually at confirmation.

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**Q:** *Does this mean that little children can vote and hold office in the church?*

**A:** No, the governance of the church and other such matters will be the privilege and responsibility of professing members. A similar distinction operates in secular government: Children become American citizens when they are born, but they cannot vote or hold office until later in life.

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**Q:** *Will our church start counting baptized members and regain the membership numbers we have lost in the last several decades?*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/faqs-about-baptism-membership-and-salvation>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/how-do-i-become-a-member-of-a-united-methodist-church>

**A:** No. While other records will certainly be kept, only professing numbers are to be counted in statistics of church membership.

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**Q:** *How will our system of rolls and record keeping be changed?*

**A:** A new system of record keeping designed by the General Council on Finance and Administration went into effect in January 2005. These new records and forms are in accord with actions of the General Conference regarding our theological understanding of baptism and membership. The most salient changes are the development of a "Record of Faith Journey" for each member and of a "Permanent Church Register."

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**Q:** *What is the difference between "full member" and "professing member"?*

**A:** The difference is the distinction between an institutional orientation and a communal orientation. To be a "full member" is something anyone can be in any secular (or volunteer) organization. Being a "full member" usually means simply that "I have joined the institution; I have paid my dues." The UMC no longer uses that term. To be a "professing member" is to make a statement of commitment and participation in a community of disciples. Being a "professing member" expresses continuing action both within the faith community and in the world. It is a statement about an individual's ongoing relationship and commitment to God and the church through Jesus Christ.

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**Q:** *Is a "baptized member" and a "preparatory member" the same thing?*

**A:** No. "Preparatory member" was a term used before 2004 to denote people the church viewed as candidates for membership. That category included baptized children and youth under the age of 18. In 2004, membership definitions changed and we no longer have a preparatory roll. "Baptized members," the current language, communicates our sacramental understanding that in baptism people "are initiated into Christ's holy church." ("Services of the Baptismal Covenant," Service I and II)

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**Q:** *Where do I find information in the Book of Discipline about church membership?*

**A:** The applicable paragraphs regarding membership are found in paragraphs 214-242 in the 2016 version.

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**Q:** *How long should my church keep membership records (and other types of records)?*

**A:** The General Council on Archives and History (gcah.org) has produced a great resource which can be downloaded at the following website:

- [http://s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/Resources/Guidelines\\_Publications/ConfRetSched.2013.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/Resources/Guidelines_Publications/ConfRetSched.2013.pdf)