

# FAQs on Membership and Records for the 2005-2008 Quadrennium

*This is an excerpt from the **2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual** (ISBN: 0-687-49810-4) available from Cokesbury. The manual contains sample pages with all of the membership forms along with guidance for their use.*

## **Preface**

The 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church enacted more than fifty changes in the *Discipline* that are related to membership. A dozen of those significantly change the way we understand membership and keep records. This FAQ is designed to help you to understand the changes and the new terminology related to membership in brief, accessible ways. You will find more detail in other places in this manual, particularly the instructional sections that deal with each record or roll sheet.

## **Changes in membership in the Discipline**

**Q: What prompted the changes related to membership in the 2004 *Discipline*?**

**A: United Methodists have been on a journey to understand baptism and membership for nearly thirty years.** Beginning with publication of a new baptismal ritual in 1976 followed by General Conference calling for an official interpretive statement on baptism in 1988. The 1996 General Conference adopted “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism” (BWAS) and called for its use in interpreting baptism and membership. The 2000 General Conference amended the Church’s constitution based on the understanding of baptism and membership in “By Water and the Spirit.”

**Q: What was the substance of the constitutional amendments?**

**A: The amendment of ¶ 4 is key.** Since the change in ¶ 4 is so central to the 2004 legislation we quote it in full here:

*Inclusiveness of the Church*—The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. *All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as **baptized members**, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become **professing members** in any local church in the connection.*

In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church

shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.

The 2004 General Conference adopted understandings and terminology for membership based on this amendment.

**Q: What other amendments to the constitution were made by the 2000 General Conference that affected membership understandings and terminology?**

**A: Amendments IV, VII, VIII, X, and XI all relate to baptism, profession, and membership in the United Methodist Church.** Amendment IV provides the definition of baptized and professing members. Amendments VII, VIII, X, XI make it clear that only those who are “professing members” can vote or be elected to share in the governance of the church. These changes, because they had to be ratified by the annual conferences, will appear for the first time in the 2004 *Book of Discipline*.

**Q. Can you summarize the membership changes in the 2004 *Discipline*?**

**A: Yes. They fall in four categories:**

1. Changes in terminology used for members
2. Changes that incorporate theological and pastoral understandings in the constitutional amendments and in “By Water and the Spirit”
3. Changes in what records and forms are required, particularly the “Permanent Church Register” (§ 233.1) and the “Record of Faith Journey” (§ 230.1)
4. Changes that guide pastoral and congregational care of members

**In the following sections, the Q and A will focus on these four dimensions of change.**

## **1 AND 2. CHANGES IN TERMINOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS**

**Q: What are the new terms for membership found in the *Discipline*?**

**A: “Baptized members” and “professing members” and variations of those terms: “baptized membership” and “professing membership.”**

**Q: What do they replace?**

**A: Baptized member replaces preparatory member, and professing member replaces full member.** However, it is important to remember that the change in terminology represents significantly different understandings.

**Q: What is a baptized member?**

**A: A baptized member is a person who has received the sacrament of baptism in a United Methodist Church or has received Christian baptism in another denomination and later transferred to a United Methodist Church.**

**Q: What is a professing member?**

**A: A professing member is a baptized person who has taken vows declaring the Christian faith.**

**Q: How is a baptized member different from what we used to call a preparatory member?**

**A: Preparatory members were not considered members, while baptized members are considered members** much the same as a child born into a family is considered fully a member of the family, though their participation and responsibility is suited to their age and developmental abilities. In addition, preparatory members were restricted to persons under the age of 19. A baptized member remains so over the course of his/her life, even after becoming a professing member. For the purposes of audits and reports, however, one would count only baptized members who have not become professing members.

**Q: How is a professing member different from what we use to call a full member?**

**A: There is no substantive difference** except that the term professing emphasizes the dynamic and ongoing nature of being a living active member of the body of Christ in and through The United Methodist Church.

**Q: How is a professing member different from a baptized member?**

**A: From a theological perspective:**

- When we call a person a baptized member, we are celebrating and emphasizing that God's unconditional grace and love have been given to the person in the sacrament of baptism. Sacraments proclaim God's action.
- When we call a person a professing member, we are recognizing the necessity of human response to what God has given. Professing members have made a personal declaration of faith in Christ and promise to live as his disciple.
- Adults and youth become baptized members and professing members at the same time in the service of the baptismal covenant when they have not been baptized previously.

**Q: How Do Baptized and Professing Members Differ?**

**A: A baptized member is preparing for confirmation and profession of faith and is in the nurturing care of the body of Christ. A professing member has declared vows of Christian faith and is held accountable by the life and discipline of the church.** From a communal perspective:

- *Baptized members*, if they have not yet made a profession of faith, are part of the community of faith, and the church nurtures them toward a profession of faith.
- *Professing members* hold each other accountable to the baptismal covenant and a continuing profession of faith through the church's life and discipline.

**Q: When recording the membership of The United Methodist Church will baptized members be counted?**

**A: No. "For statistical purposes, church membership is equated to the number of people listed on the roll of professing members" or the professing membership of the church.** See ¶ 215. However, baptized members are members of the church by the action of God in the sacrament of baptism, and they are to be encouraged to grow in grace and become professing members. See ¶ 216.

### **3. CHANGES IN WHAT RECORDS AND FORMS ARE REQUIRED**

**Q: In the 2004 *Discipline*, what are the required forms?**

**A: The required permanent church register, a membership record of the faith journeys of baptized and professing members, a list of the names of professing members removed by action of the charge conference, a constituency roll, and a roll of affiliate and associate members.** There are other forms and records that are recommended. For a brief description of these required records and references to the applicable paragraphs in the 2004 *Discipline*, see page 7.

**Q: Which of these are new? Do they replace something else?**

**A: The Permanent Church Register and the Record of Faith Journey.** The Permanent Church Register replaces the old Chronological Roll of Full Members, and the Record of Faith Journey is totally new.

**Q: What is the Permanent Church Register?**

**A: It adapts the old "Chronological Roll" in ways that accommodate the new legislation related to baptized and professing members.**

For instructions and a sample form, see pages 22-23 in this manual. Your church will need to begin use of the "register" incorporating persons listed on your previously existing preparatory membership roll and adding all newly received members starting on January 1, 2005.

**Q: What is the Record of Faith Journey (RFJ) and what is it supposed to do?**

**A: It is a record kept for each baptized member (See ¶ 230.1). It is to be prepared whenever a child, youth or adult is baptized or a youth or adult is baptized and professes his or her faith so that the pastor and church can record and know that member's story. It is a record that grows as the member takes additional steps from baptism to death. The RFJ "travels" with the member throughout his/her life journey and accommodates changes in church membership. It is both a tool for auditing the church's membership, for recording required information on church members as specified by the *Discipline* (¶ 230.1), and for recording significant moments that illuminate each member's relationship to God and to the church. Some suggested uses for this form are: to be filled out together by pastors and new members; use in confirmation classes and church school classes to reflect on and share their individual faith journeys. For more, see pages 18-19 in this manual.**

#### **4. CHANGES THAT GUIDE PASTORAL AND CON-GREGATIONAL CARE OF MEMBERS**

**Q: Why were the new records and forms created?**

**A: The intent of the changes made by General Conference were these:**

- **To create records and forms that are user friendly, accurate, and useful.** The Committee on Forms and Records of The General Council on Finance and Administration has created records in accordance with the will of the General Conference and has diligently asked, "Will this system and these forms provide useful information for the care of members and for ongoing evaluation of the church's life and mission?"
- **To create records and forms that are consistent with our United Methodist theology and practice.** Since we understand salvation to be a life-long journey using the means of grace and watching over one another in love, the system is designed to maximize our sense of living relationship with one another within the baptismal covenant.

**Q: When do we begin to implement this new record keeping system?**

**A: January 1, 2005.** However, you can begin now by ordering the forms and planning for how you will enter data.

**Q: Are there other changes in the membership record system of The United Methodist Church?**

**A: Yes.** The preparatory membership roll is eliminated. There are some changes in the Record of Baptism, Constituency Roll, Family/Household Roll and Family/Household Roll cards, Record of Marriages, Record of Death, and Members Removed by Charge Conference Action. In addition to changes in terminology, several of the forms now request information about the racial/ethnic identity and gender of church members as a tool that will help your church celebrate both its diversity and its unity as a community of faith. Thus, the collection of such information will neither exclude persons nor fragment the community of Christians who identify themselves as United Methodists. See pages 4-5 and the various forms in this manual.

**Q: Will the changes call for a massive effort to update our records?**

**A: No. Though there is a definite changeover date, your church will be able to gradually update existing records. There are specific but limited actions you will need to accomplish starting January 1, 2005.** You, as pastor and membership secretary, will need to study the new records and instructions in this manual so that you are ready for the change over.

**Q: Will our church need to buy new forms or adapt our electronic data system?**

**A: Yes.** You will need to purchase the new forms and begin using them as of January 1, 2005. If your church keeps records electronically, you will need to adapt the database forms. You will retain your existing records. Starting in 2005, baptized persons are to be added to the Permanent Church Register, as they are now according to the *Discipline* members of the local church. It is recommended that, as of December 31, 2004, churches begin with adding the baptized persons who were on the previously existing Preparatory Roll. (Note that after January 1, 2005, the Preparatory Roll no longer exists.) It is not necessary to go back historically to add persons to the Register, but do note that all professing members on the Register to date are also baptized members and need to be treated accordingly in regard to membership removals when performing the audits. Beginning with January 1, 2005, all newly received baptized members are to be recorded on this Permanent Church Register. Members are recorded in this register in the chronological order in which they were received. Gradually, you will be able to update older records, but there is no necessity to do this immediately.

**Q: What groups of persons will we have to audit annually?**

**A:** Professing Members (§ 231, 234, 235); baptized members who have not become professing members (§ 226.3); associate and affiliate members (§ 231); and the constituency roll (§ 231).

**Q: If we use the membership record system as mandated by the Discipline, will it help the pastor to complete the "Report of the Pastor" and Table I of the "Local Church Report to the Annual Conference"?**

**A: Yes.** The system is integrated to enable the pastor and membership secretary to provide this information when called for. In this way it serves both a local church membership care function and a research and planning function at the annual conference and general church level.

**Q: Is there a biblical, theological and pastoral reason that can help us understand the membership system as a ministry that matters?**

**A: Yes.** Since God acts in human history, historical records are of great significance. They become salvation history because they contain the story of God's action to save sinful human beings. The community of faith expresses its caring concern for the persons to whom it ministers in maintaining records of the faith journeys of individuals and congregations. An important task of the church is the serious discipline of caring for and sustaining the vital relationships among the people of God. Records are means to remember, empower, and stimulate personal belief in Christ.

We need to keep track of people because they are citizens of God's kingdom. Led by the Holy Spirit, Christian life progresses through the stages of faith. These stages are often reflected in the records that the community of faith keeps. The church has the privilege of preserving, sharing, and utilizing the records of God's people while maintaining contact with its members and encouraging them to be responsible participants in the ongoing life of the church.

You will find an expanded section on the biblical and United Methodist basis for record keeping on pages 3-4 in this manual.

# Online Articles and Helps

**Baptism and Membership Library:** Here you will find a range of interpretive resources that will help you understand the history and meaning of the changes in our understanding and practice of baptism, membership and record keeping. Most of the resources here were developed in preparation for the constitutional changes made by the 2000 General Conference.

[http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=2518](http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=2518)

**“By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism”:** This is the full text of the official interpretive statement on baptism.

[http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water\\_spirit/](http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/)

**FAQs about Baptism, Membership, and Salvation** by Gayle Felton and Peggy Sewell This is a very helpful series of FAQs that deal with confusing and troubling concerns to many.

[http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=2258](http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=2258)