Membership Principles
Morningside United Methodist Church

What is membership in a church?

What does it mean to be a member of Morningside United Methodist Church?

What if I'm not a member of a church?

Do I have to be a member of a church to be a Christian?

If I don't have to be a member of a church to be a Christian, then why become a member at all?

What if I already am a member of another church? Should I switch membership to Morningside?

What if I'm only here for a year or two?

What if I already am a member of another church of a different denomination? Should I switch to United Methodism?

How do I become a member?

But I have a fear of commitment. Can I take the membership classes without deciding to become a member?

What is membership in a church?

Membership in a church is a Christian's commitment to attend worship at, have fellowship with, and participate in the programs of one church. A Christian is also part of the universal church and shares fellowship with other Christians all over the world. But membership focuses that participation toward the well-being of one specific church. It's similar to being a U.S. citizen on a national level, yet participating in the programs of a particular city.

Denominations function in a similar manner. Membership in the universal church is what ultimately matters since we are all under Christ. Denominations such the United Methodist Church or the Presbyterian Church of America are merely human institutions that serve as ways to organize the church into more manageable substrata. Every denomination has its own regulations and governing bodies, but all subscribe to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. However, denominations are absolutely beneficial because they provide the necessary framework which allows individual churches to serve the world in a more efficient and orderly manner, and provides accountability for churches that fall on hard times. Non-denominational churches often stand on the authority of one senior pastor but what happens to the church if that pastor leaves? Denominations offer support and accountability in such cases. If being a Christian is like being a U.S. citizen and membership in a church is like participating in city programs, then denominational affiliation can be likened to being a member of a state.

What does it mean to be a member of Morningside UMC?

Membership in Morningside UMC means membership in both the local church (Morningside United Methodist Church) and the United Methodist Church denomination. As such, it entails both benefits and responsibilities.

The primary benefit of membership is that it gives a member the right to vote in all church matters. Furthermore, only members can serve as chairpersons of a committee. And members have a right to certain benefits (i.e. pre-marital counseling, space use) without fee. Essentially, membership is for those with a commitment to and vested interest in one church (Morningside UMC). If you are committed to seeing Morningside UMC grow and mature as a church community, then strongly consider becoming a member.

Membership also entails responsibilities. Members are asked to participate in the local church through four primary avenues: **Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service**. These four responsibilities coincide with who we are as Christians. All Christians *worship* and *serve* God, and we do these two things as *individuals* and *corporately*.

1) Our *individual worship* of God is represented by our **Prayers** – we are called as Christians to maintain the daily disciplines of prayer, reading the Word, and other means of grace. Membership in a church holds us accountable to our personal walk with God.

2) Our *corporate worship* of God is represented by our **Presence** – we are called as Christians to participate in Sunday service, Bible studies, and other corporate acts of worship. Membership in a church holds us accountable to our corporate walk with God.

3) Our *individual service* to God is represented by our **Gifts** – we are called as Christians to contribute joyfully to the church through our tithes and other gifts. Membership in a church holds us accountable to our personal service to God.

4) Our *corporate service* to God is represented by our **Service** – we are called as Christians to organize and participate in communal outreach programs to help the poor and needy and to witness the love of Christ to the world. Membership in a church holds us accountable to our corporate service to God.

What if I'm not a member of a church?

First of all, non-member status does NOT in any way affect a person's freedom to worship with us and participate in Morningside UMC events. Morningside welcomes EVERYONE to its worship and fellowship, member or not.

Do I have to be a member of a church to be a Christian?

Not being a member of a church does NOT mean one is not a Christian or does not adhere to Christian beliefs. In other words, one can be a Christian and not be a member of any church. However, at a basic level, it is critical to attend church, share fellowship with other Christians, and participate in its programs because the Christian faith was never meant to be practiced individually. We are called the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12) because we need each other. God created us to be in community.

In fact, some people may be turned off by organized religion and religious institutions because they are fallible and make mistakes. Some have even been hurt deeply by churches in the past. But the truth of the matter is that all people are fallible whether they go to church or not, and part of being at church is learning to forgive and accept one another in such a way that presents a gracious witness to an unforgiving world. We don't go to church to be perfect; we go to church to learn how to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. That's what the cross is all about. As such, part of our Christian faith is forgiving other Christians who may not always act Christian. It is when the church truly lives out its creed of grace that it truly produces followers of Christ.

If I don't have to be a member of a church to be a Christian, then why become a member at all?

Because God works through human institutions. There is no other way to say it. The institutional church and its various missionary programs and parachurch organizations, for all their good facets and flaws, are God's ordained vehicle for the spreading of God's kingdom. The church is God's plan A … there is no plan B! This is a testimony to the level of trust God invests in God's beloved body.

Membership in a church, though not absolutely necessary, is crucial to its well-functioning. Membership invests people with a sense of ownership of the church, and that ownership leads members to care for the church in a way that non-members may not. Membership also adds stability to a church; whoever else the church can count on to lead, participate in, and promote its kingdom-centered programs, the church knows it can count on its members. And God is glorified when Christians love and care for their church.

What if I already am a member of another church? Should I switch membership to Morningside?

Morningside believes all Christians should be members of one *local* church (whether Morningside or any church for that matter) in which they intend actively to get involved, to serve and to live out true Christian discipleship.

What if I'm only here for a year or two?

Again, membership means involvement. We encourage people temporarily to transfer their membership to a local church in which they intend to get involved for the time they're in the area. It's a way of keeping ourselves accountable to getting involved in a church wherever we go.

What if I already am a member of another church of a different denomination? Should I switch to United Methodism?

That's a decision only an individual can make. Morningside UMC is a part of the United Methodist denomination, and membership classes will go over the basic differences between United Methodism and other denominations. The most a person can do is be informed and come to one's own reasoned and prayerful judgment. But Morningside absolutely does not discriminate based on denominational affiliation. People of all denominations are welcome to worship and participate at Morningside whether or not they become members of the United Methodist Church.

How do I become a member?

Two membership classes are offered as a prerequisite to being inducted as a member. The classes will cover basic Christian theology, the basic history, beliefs and organizational structure of the United Methodist denomination and our local church, Morningside UMC. Membership inductions usually take place on Easter Sunday and our Anniversary Sunday (in September). It involves making a public profession of faith and commitment to the Christian church as a whole and Morningside UMC in particular. Please contact our office as soon as possible if you wish to become a member or are simply interested in attending classes and learning more: office@morningside-nyc.com We will try our best to schedule classes in order to accommodate people's schedule, and will offer make-up classes at different times if necessary.

But I have a fear of commitment. Can I take the membership classes without deciding to become a member?

Absolutely! Feel free to attend classes, pray and consider carefully whether to make the commitment to become a member of Morningside UMC. You can always take the class and decide later.