

Our Model of Church Membership: Time for a Change?

February 2017

Please [respond](#) by June 30, 2017



Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee
The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

Our Model of Church Membership: Time for a Change?



Copyright © 2017
The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



This document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd) Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice.

All biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Care has been taken to trace ownership of copyright material contained in this text. The publisher will gratefully accept any information that will enable it to rectify any reference or credit in subsequent printings.

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON
Canada M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
www.united-church.ca

Our Model of Church Membership: Time for a Change?

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee invites your response to this study document on membership in The United Church of Canada, a study authorized by the 42nd General Council that met in Corner Brook in 2015. At the end of this document you will find the questions we are seeking feedback on. You are invited to respond either by using the survey link found there or by sending a hardcopy to the address provided. To give a sense of the questions being asked before reaching the end of the document, you will see them numbered and in bold type at various places throughout this document. You will also have an opportunity to make other comments at the end.

Why This Study? Our Current Practices and the Challenges They Present

What does it mean to be a member of The United Church of Canada? What does it mean for the church when formal understandings of membership create barriers rather than opportunities for ministry? Should membership be primarily about discipleship and faith, or about governance of the church? Is baptism necessary for membership or leadership in the church? Is it possible for someone to be a member of the United Church without belonging to a congregation? How might individuals involved in new, emerging faith communities be members of the church? What might membership mean in non-congregational settings like community ministries? What happens to membership for those whose church closes and for whom no other United Church community is accessible? How does the United Church deal with a generational shift away from formal structures and therefore formal understandings of membership? Is membership even a meaningful term today? If membership is no longer working, how can the United Church govern itself?

These are some of the questions facing the church that have led to this study.

The 42nd General Council 2015 directed the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee “to invite the church into a study of the meaning of membership, including the relationship of baptism and membership, and bring to the 43rd General Council [2018] a recommendation of membership for the church as a result of that study.” It also approved a change in the current model of membership, a change that is now being tested by remit in the church: to allow full members of a community of faith to decide to allow adherents to vote on all matters before a congregational meeting (Remit 8, www.gc42.ca/remits).

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that the current remit concerning adherents and the situations in which they can vote represents what is already common practice in some congregations and inclination in many. Prior to the 2015 General Council, the committee considered a further interim step that again reflects an unauthorized practice in many congregations: allowing adherents to serve on governing councils. The committee recognized, however, that this step could dramatically shift the relationship of baptism, profession of faith, and leadership in the church and needed further exploration. *The Manual* also currently authorizes presbyteries to approve requests from church councils for specific and individual exemptions to this requirement in special circumstances.

1. Does your Community of Faith adhere to the current expectations of membership in *The Manual*?

Yes No Don't Know

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that formal understandings of church membership have been shifting for some time. Many congregations have experienced people coming into the church who have not been baptized and have had little or no experience with traditional church life. Many of these people want to be involved and are often invited into participation and leadership as part of a journey of deepening faith and connection with the church.

Diana Butler Bass and others have pointed to a paradigm shift in church membership from

Believing – Behaving – Belonging to *Belonging – Behaving – Believing*.¹

For a growing number of people, activity and engagement represent an entry point to church involvement. They find that through belonging to and participating in a community they are led into deeper reflection and faith.

For most people today, membership is synonymous with belonging. Showing up, attending worship, giving, serving on committees, and leading activities are all related to this sense of being members, of belonging. It is a challenge for many to understand the significance of Christian baptism and profession of faith as intimately linked to membership. Many have found themselves in circumstances where they discover, and are surprised, that they are not considered members and are not eligible to vote or to serve on church councils.

In part, this situation arises because our current membership practice clearly represents the former paradigm above. This model is not a challenge in an overwhelming Christian society where most people are baptized as children and many grow up in a congregational community. But it looks quite different from the context of someone who has no church memory or history and for whom profession of faith and baptism are entirely new concepts.

Adult baptism (with its accompanying public profession of faith) represents, in this context, a significant step that most would choose to take only after a journey of exploration and formation. And in many cases, it is leadership roles in the congregation that help to bring individuals to such a faith commitment.

Is baptism then best practised as the required entry point to membership and active participation in the life of a congregation, or is it better seen as a significant step of discipleship and spiritual commitment emerging from that participation?

What might it mean to open our understanding of membership to a new paradigm of membership in which the entry point is the choice to join to participate in God's mission?

1. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

Would a shift in this practice allow the church to deepen and strengthen its practice of baptism at the heart of its life?

Past Work on the Understanding of Membership

The United Church has extensively explored its understanding and practice of membership since the 1960s. In 1962 the Division of Mission in Canada released the report “Doctrine and Practice of Church Membership.” It was followed later by several years of exploration on Christian Initiation (1980–1984), including the first remit extended to all pastoral charges. The most recent report, “Belonging: Privilege and Responsibility,” was received by the 37th General Council 2000.

In 1984, 1989, and 2001, remits were sent to pastoral charges and presbyteries testing the affirmation that all who are baptized are members of the church. The remits emerged from the ambiguous wording of Basis of Union 5.8.1, which suggests that all baptized children are members but also have the “privilege and duty” when they reach the age of discretion to enter into “full membership.” The failure of these remits has been understood to mean that for those already baptized as children a formal profession of faith (i.e., confirmation) in addition to their earlier baptism is required for “full membership”—that is, membership that includes the rights and responsibilities of voting and of holding particular offices within the church. While the 1984 and 1989 remits also sought clarity around the admission of children to communion, and failed, momentum reflected in the liturgical practices of the church and the significant and timely report “A Place for You” (1989) clearly answered the question that children were indeed welcome at communion. In fact, some sessions in the 1989 remit voted no because they thought the remit would restrict admission to communion to those who were baptized, and they wanted a more open table than that. The 2001 remit tested a proposal that the church no longer use the term “full membership.” While it also failed, an increasing number of congregations appear to no longer make a distinction between full members and adherents in their governance.

The 37th General Council 2000, possibly in anticipation of the difficulties presented by the remit circulated in 2001, requested the Theology and Faith Committee to prepare the “necessary resources that would enable The United Church of Canada to engage in a discussion of the meaning and theology of baptism as well as the nature of the church (ecclesiology).” No formal action was taken by the committee on this request. However, for other reasons it later responded to the challenge of ecclesiology (which is theological reflection about the nature and mission of the church) with the report “A Church with Purpose” to the 41st General Council 2012.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that baptism should remain integral to the church’s understanding of membership, and that all those who seek to grow in faith should be invited and encouraged to accept baptism as the sacramental sign of their new life in Jesus.

Other Questions around the Meaning of Membership

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee is not proposing a full study on the nature and practice of baptism. However, it recognizes that questions remain on the relationship of

baptism, membership, and profession of faith. One possible model of membership that will be described later suggests distinguishing membership in a local community of faith on the one hand and baptism and profession of faith on the other.

In the meantime, other questions surrounding the meaning of membership are also becoming significant.

As rural and remote congregations close, what avenues of continued membership remain for faithful members for whom there is no easily accessible United Church community? The Uniting Church of Australia authorizes its presbyteries to maintain membership rolls in such situations. Should this be a practice in the United Church?

Currently membership is limited to those recorded by a church session or its equivalent (with the exception of Armed Forces chaplaincies). Membership, in other words, presupposes an established and traditional congregational model. Many new forms of community are emerging. How might it be possible for those who choose to express their faith in these new forms of community to share in membership and leadership in the United Church? Is it possible to open other avenues of church membership that acknowledge much greater variety in what faith communities look like today and certainly will look like in the future?

Some United Church people today find their place of belonging and connection with the church outside a local community of faith. Some are not able to find a local community in which they feel at home, but they feel a strong connection to the mission of the larger church.

Community (outreach) ministries question models of the church that exclude people on the margins of society (most often encountered in community ministries) as not full participants or members of the church. Are not many of the attributes of church membership, they question, present among the people who participate in these ministries irrespective of, or perhaps specifically because, they are often among the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society?

Increasing numbers of United Church congregations are responding to requests from members of other faiths who wish to align themselves in some formal way with the United Church while remaining primarily connected to their home faith. For example, a person from another faith community may have a United Church person as a partner and attend worship regularly with their partner. Or members of other faith communities may want to connect with a United Church congregation in some ongoing way—to sponsor refugees, for example—while retaining their primary allegiance to their faith tradition. Is it necessary to make formal allowance for “associate membership” that is different from how we have understood “adherent”? Does the term “adherent” adequately address the commitment and engagement of those who wish to align themselves with the United Church without wanting to become members of a Christian church? What is desired here is not “membership” in the way we have previously thought of it, but it is a desire for some recognized way of connecting with a United Church congregation.

2. Should the United Church make formal provision for anyone who shares the values and mission of the church to affirm a connection to the church that is different from membership?

- Yes No Don't Know

Many of the issues raised in this section point to an ongoing debate about whether membership in the church needs to be based on welcoming and inviting the participation of a new generation of seekers who have little commitment to formal understandings of membership or whether it should be focused on high expectations of discipleship and significant preparation for a life-changing decision.

To choose the latter suggests that baptism, profession of faith, and therefore membership would come only after an extensive time of preparation and that participation in some forms of leadership or spiritual decision making in the life of the congregation would be delayed until that time. To choose the former appears to mean abandoning any standards of belief and behaviour for membership.

To accept this polarity, however, fails to recognize that growth in faith and capacity for leadership and spiritual discernment take place over time and through engagement. It fails to acknowledge, as Butler Bass suggests, that for many in a new generation, belonging and therefore participating is the entry point to this journey.

The concept of church membership raises theological questions. Without question, we affirm the value of a sense of belonging. One thing that attracts people to a community of faith is precisely the sense of community we believe is composed not only of those individuals with whom we gather for worship and other activities but also of those around the world who see themselves as Christians. We do have different starting points, depending on whether we were raised in the church from the time we were small children or whether our first exploration of the Christian faith or a Christian community began when we were adults. A sense of belonging to the church is a significant draw for people of whatever age. At the same time, membership brings with it not only gifts such as connectedness and belonging but also the requirement for formation in the Christian faith tradition. Such a process of formation is followed at some point by a willingness publicly to profess one's faith and make a commitment to live one's life in an intentional way that reflects the faith professed. Both the sense of belonging and the need for faith formation are values we want to uphold. How do we weigh out these values, both of which we want to affirm, when we think about membership?

Are we called to give greater weight to belonging when we think about governance in the local congregation, or are we called to a renewed emphasis on a faith commitment as a requirement for participating in key governing bodies at the local level, governing bodies that make important, faith-based decisions?

3. On the spectrum below, where do you believe the church's model of membership needs to place its emphasis? Circle the dot that applies.

Belonging and Participation

Belief/Affirmation of Faith



Ways of Thinking about Membership

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith-Committee invites your comments on two possible models of membership as part of the process leading to a recommendation about membership to the 43rd General Council 2018. Model One is based on the existing model, with a few small changes. Model Two reflects the shift in belonging outlined above. The committee is also asking for suggestions of other models that might be considered.

Model One

This model is a slightly revised version of our current one.

In our current model—and this may come as a surprise—there are three ways people can have a formal relationship with a local congregation:

Member

- A member is a child who has been baptized but has not made a profession of their faith for themselves, or someone who is the child of a full member (defined below) regardless of whether the child has been baptized. These individuals are seen as part of the local congregation.
- A member does not have a vote in matters coming before a congregational meeting.

Adherent

- An adherent is active in the life of a local congregation but has never chosen to become a full member through adult baptism or, if they were baptized as a child, through a profession of faith.
- At a congregational meeting, the full members of the congregation may give adherents the right to vote on “temporal matters,” but even with that permission there are a number of specific items on which adherents are not able to vote. That list includes, among other things, calling a minister or buying or selling property. A remit currently taking place in presbyteries would, if a majority of presbyteries agree, make it possible for congregations to give adherents the right to vote on all matters. This possibility, if approved by a majority of presbyteries, would not come into effect until after the 43rd General Council 2018.
- Adherents are permitted to hold only some offices in the life of the congregation, the range of offices varying with the particular governance model under which the congregation functions.

Full Member

- A full member was baptized as a child and has made a profession of faith, or was baptized as an adult, or has transferred their membership into a United Church congregation from another congregation that is either United Church or another denomination. This process of adult baptism or profession of faith usually follows a period of instruction in the Christian faith and the ethos of the United Church; the length, method, and content of such instruction varies from one congregation to another. In

making their profession of faith, individuals answer questions about their beliefs and their intention to live a life in keeping with those beliefs.

- Full members can hold any governance position in the congregation and can vote on all matters at all meetings of the congregation.
- Each congregation keeps a Historic Roll of those who are full members, which indicates when and how a person became a member (by profession of faith, adult baptism, or transfer of membership), and, if they are no longer a member, when and how they ceased to be a member (e.g., death, transfer of membership to another congregation).
- People who represent the congregation as members of other courts of the church (presbytery or Conference) must be full members. So, too, must candidates for ministry and those working in certain staff positions in a Conference or the General Council.

Advantages of Retaining the Current Model

This first model, a very slight revision of our current one, maintains an inseparable relationship between baptism and membership. Such has been the historic practice of the church—not only the United Church but also most Christian denominations and, indeed, the Christian Church from its early days. The two major Christian denominations that do not require baptism for membership are the Salvation Army and the Quakers. In our current model, baptism is seen as necessary for membership. Any move away from the link between baptism and membership would cause some of our ecumenical partners concern.

In Canada, we now live in a secular society where the practice of Christianity or, for that matter, any recognized religion, is something done by a minority and generally regarded with either ambivalence or mild hostility by the wider society. In this context, some argue that we ought to not only retain the current requirements for full membership and restrict certain governance positions to those willing to make such a commitment, but also become more demanding and rigorous than we have historically been in the preparation and requirements for church membership. Our current patterns of preparing people for church membership developed in a Canadian society that was predominantly Christian and sympathetic to the church and the practice of Christianity. In our current, and increasingly secular, society we can no longer assume that the wider society will “teach” people about the Christian faith. The church needs to undertake this educational task itself and do so in a rigorous, thorough way. So, a move away from our current model or a failure to become more rigorous about membership commitments than we are at present could fail to prepare those involved with the United Church for the challenges of living (in an increasingly secular society) a life guided by the Christian faith.

Our current system ensures that only those willing to make a formal commitment to a United Church congregation hold certain key governance positions, though some governance positions are still open to those who have not made the profession of faith necessary for full membership.

Challenges in Retaining the Current Model

Unquestionably, we live in a time when people are more reluctant to join *any* institution. Other voluntary associations (which is what the church also is)—whether one looks at the Rotary Club, the local bowling league, or a town’s Library Association—have also seen declines in membership and participation similar to what we have seen in the United Church and in other

denominations we would once have called “mainline.” Our current model, which demands that people make a formal declaration of faith and promise to lead their lives in a particular way before they can become full members, runs counter to that societal trend.

Some theorists believe we have moved to a point where belonging and activity become the entry point to a deeper relationship with the church—that developing and deepening relationship then leads to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith and, in turn, to the possibility of seeking that membership status we now know as full membership.

Our current model unquestionably leads to confusion. Many people who have little or no previous acquaintance with the United Church begin to attend and then become active in the life of their local congregation. They assume that because they are attending regularly and are active in its life they are also members who enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of membership. They are confused, and often hurt, to discover that when the congregation needs to make a major decision—calling a new minister, for example—they are not full members and not entitled to vote on that decision. They may be equally hurt to discover that they are not permitted to hold certain governance offices because they are not full members. The confusion arises in part because we do not pay sufficient attention in our congregations to encouraging people to become full members and to explaining the privileges and responsibilities of full membership.

Model Two

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee developed this model as a potential way to reflect the changing nature of communities of faith and of a new generational understanding of belonging.

Member

- The members of a community of faith would be those who have been welcomed by the governing board and have affirmed their desire,
 - drawn by God’s grace, to follow Jesus by choosing to live a life of compassion
 - drawn by God’s grace, to live and act in hope for God’s world
 - drawn by God’s grace, to grow in faith within this community of The United Church of Canada
- How children should be included in membership is a matter that would need to be worked out.
- Members of the community of faith would be eligible to vote at all meetings and to serve at whatever levels of governance (potentially all) the community of faith decides are open to members as opposed to being restricted to professing members.
- The community of faith would keep a list of its members.

Professing Member

- A person would become a professing member of the community of faith with the approval of its governing board through baptism (if not already baptized) and profession of faith. Professing members would be equivalent to full members in Model One.

- It is the hope of The United Church of Canada that every member of a community of faith would choose to become a professing member of the church.
- The community of faith would determine which offices and roles within its structures require professing membership.
- This provision about the community of faith's local structures aside, all candidates for accountable ministry and representatives to other courts of the United Church would have to be professing members.
- A Historic Roll of professing members would be held by local communities of faith. (Background material submitted to the 42nd General Council 2015 had suggested the possibility of a membership roll held either by a regional body or by the General Council. In developing Model Two, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee decided not to include such a possibility.)

Associate Member

- A community of faith could enter the names on their membership list of individuals who wish to align themselves with the mission and ministry of the community and The United Church of Canada as associate members. Associate members would have a voice at all meetings of the community of faith but no vote.

Background to Model Two

The changes proposed would require a category 3 remit (a vote by presbyteries and the governing board of each pastoral charge) because of the change in the understanding of membership. The current remit that would enable congregations to extend to adherents the right to vote on all matters is something much more limited than what is proposed in this model. In Model Two, baptism would not be required for membership in a local community of faith or for positions of leadership in that community. Members would also be allowed to vote on spiritual (non-temporal) matters.

The proposal for professing member is a change in name from “full member,” but it leaves intact the existing provisions in *The Manual*, including requiring that all candidates for accountable ministry leadership and all representatives to higher courts be professing members. The term associate member is changed from the existing category of “adherent,” and associate members would have a voice at all meetings of the community of faith, but no vote.

Member

Model Two would emphasize an invitation to become members of the church to all those, drawn by God's grace, who desire to follow Jesus by living a life of compassion, who wish to align themselves in hope to God's mission, and who want to grow in faith within a local community of The United Church of Canada. These words have been chosen as a basic, open, and invitational call to join with a community of seekers and believers.² The phrasing of “to follow Jesus by living a life of compassion” (rather than simply “to follow Jesus”) is intentional in giving meaning and focus to an often-abused concept. It also highlights the link to the scriptural qualities of faith, hope, and love:

2. With appreciation, the first two of these three points are drawn from the work of Kennon Callahan.

- drawn by God’s grace, to follow Jesus by choosing to live a life of compassion (love)
- drawn by God’s grace, to live and act in hope for God’s world (hope)
- drawn by God’s grace, to grow in faith within this community of The United Church of Canada (faith)

The affirmations emphasize the movement of the Spirit in the life of an individual to engage in ministry as well as to function more fully within the organization of the community of faith. It accords membership based on belonging and participation and opens the individual to professing membership based on a belief and affirmation at a certain stage in their journey of faith.

Membership would be initiated by a request to the governing board. (For example, it could be an Application for Membership card with the above criteria that is signed and given to the minister or other representative of the community.) Members would be those who are affirmed by the governing board and recorded on the list of members. They would be eligible to vote at congregational or community meetings on all matters and to serve in those positions (potentially all) of leadership that the community of faith decides will be open to members, rather than restricted to professing members.

The critical difference from existing policy is that baptism and a formal public profession of faith would not be *required* for this new category of local church membership.

Professing Member

The term professing member was chosen as a way of being descriptive rather than hierarchical. Professing members would be those who have been baptized and have made a public profession of faith. The model maintains the existing terminology in *The Manual* for full member and upholds the language of Basis of Union 8.6.2.1(b), “that no terms of admission to full membership shall be prescribed other than those laid down in the New Testament.”

The intention of Model Two is to encourage a member to move toward becoming a professing member as a journey in discipleship—that is, to see it as an invitational and significant spiritual step rather than as something necessary for either “fitting in” or as a hurdle to participating in some or all of the local governance structures of the congregation.

It is proposed that the following statement be added to *The Manual* accompanying the description of professing member: “It is the hope of The United Church of Canada that every member of a community of faith will become a professing member of the church.”

The community of faith would maintain responsibility for oversight of membership and could vary in their practices for professing members, from requiring a formal process of study and a one-time profession of faith, to more informal practices of multiple occasions of profession.

The community of faith would also be responsible for determining which offices must be filled by professing members. In other words, a community of faith might choose to follow a more traditional pattern and determine that all members of the governing board will be professing members.

These options provide for significant diversity in the practices of membership among communities of faith within the United Church. The community of faith would maintain its Christian identity through the three affirmations as above, as well as through its full participation in The United Church of Canada.

Identity and continuity with the global Christian community would also be maintained by requiring all candidates for paid accountable ministry (and therefore all ministers) as well as representatives to other courts of the church to be baptized and professing members.

A Historic Roll of professing members would be maintained by a local community of faith.

Associate Member

The category of “adherent” would be renamed associate member. Associate members would be individuals who wish to align themselves with a community of faith (and with the United Church) as a sign of support for its work in the community and the world. They might be members of other faiths who do not wish to leave their own tradition (and do not wish to be involved as voting members of the United Church community) but wish to stand in solidarity with the United Church community. They might be people who periodically visit (have a summer or winter home) and do not want to be voting members. Associate members would be recorded on the local membership list and would have a voice at community of faith meetings, but no vote.

This understanding of associate member would also mean that distinctions between spiritual and temporal (financial) matters would no longer be necessary.

Theological Foundation

In the early generations of the Christian Church’s life, baptism marked a person’s entry into church membership. While we cannot say definitively that children were not baptized during this period, for the first several centuries adult baptism was unquestionably the norm. In that era, significant instruction in the faith and in what being a Christian meant for how you lived your life preceded (adult) baptism; your baptism made you a member of the church, and you were now welcome to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion (or the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist, to use other terms for this sacrament). Over time, the practice of baptizing children and infants began; when these children were older, they were given instruction in the Christian faith and would be “confirmed.” In other words, the baptism of infants and small children started to lengthen the process, and these parts of the initiation rite (baptism, membership, and first reception of communion) that had initially happened in immediate succession to one another became separated and occurred over a period of time. During and after the Reformation of the 16th century, some denominations returned to the early church practice of baptizing only adults, thereby adding to the diversity of the Christian tradition. One common understanding has existed, however, regardless of the age of the person at the point of baptism and/or membership: the faith tradition, or the journey of faith, is never complete at any one moment in time. At whatever age or stage of life the individual begins the journey, the individual’s understanding will continue to grow.

This pattern from history—that faith develops over time and that an individual’s journey is lifelong—undergirds Model Two. Rather than linking aspects of local governance and decision

making to membership as strongly as we do now, this model allows for increased participation in the life of the community by the member, even as their faith develops to the point where, it is hoped, they will decide to become a professing member.

While baptism would not be required for a person to become a member, there is no intention in this proposed model either to diminish the church's emphasis on infant baptism as a liturgical celebration welcoming or initiating the child of a believing family into the community of faith or to remove the requirement of adult baptism for those seeking to become professing members who were not baptized as children.

This model seeks to embrace the concepts of both "belonging" and "affirming one's faith." It offers an entry point based on a simple and yet meaningful affirmation of faith. It is responsive to the nudging of the Spirit to allow individuals to say that they find their heart aligned with a community of faith, that they are drawn to be part of it. This approach invites people into a journey of growth through participation. It acknowledges that God's Spirit can be active in their lives before baptism as well as after, and that they can offer wisdom and leadership to the community while they are growing in faith.

It is not the intention of Model Two to separate local membership from national membership. Members and professing members would both be located in a local community of faith. What this model offers is an acknowledgement that within a community different people are in different places in their journey of faith, but they are all a part of the community of faith.

While the United Church has struggled with the lack of clarity in its Basis of Union between "member" and "full member," there is no question that a profession of faith has been an integral part of this rite of initiation. But as noted above, the rites of initiation, which also historically have included participation in Holy Communion, in some denominations (including our own) have often taken place over an extended period. It is this extended period of time that points to the relationship of baptism, profession of faith, and membership as fluid and varied, depending on the particular needs of the community and of the time.

Model Two emphasizes the concept that within the community of faith people are at different stages of faith: those who have made a profession of faith through baptism, those who are on a journey of deepening faith, and those who desire only to align themselves with the mission and life of the community expressed in the affirmations of faith for membership. In other words, in this model room is made for those who are held by the community on their journey toward deeper and fuller expressions of discipleship. In doing so, it mirrors the call of Jesus to his disciples to come and follow him, a call that did not presume baptism but invited them on a journey.

This model affirms that baptism represents the universal dimension of the church and the wider denominational and global church. It holds up baptism not as a bridge to participation and leadership, or as a solely individualistic expression of faith, but rather as the declaration of the whole community that its members are journeying together in faith and discipleship. Therefore, Model Two assists in recovering the importance of baptism and profession of faith in the life of the church: first in the basic affirmations that are part of being a member of a community of faith, and then in the invitation to a public profession of faith. It moves profession of faith away

from confirmation (or, as some have said, the graduation model) toward a post-Christendom reality of decision for faith.

There are a wide range of biblical foundations for Model Two: the journey motifs in Genesis and Exodus, John Wesley's famous sermon (based on 2 Kings 10:15), "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart.... If it is, give me your hand"; the gifts of the body (1 Corinthians 12); dry bones taking on flesh as a metaphor for membership (Ezekiel 37); "Come and see" (John 1:46); Jesus' call of the disciples.

Participation (belonging) in a community of faith, together with the basic affirmations of faith, become the main criteria for entry into local church membership. Model Two welcomes participation and affirms that it is integrally linked to decision making (voting) and leadership (office holding.) The expectations of preparation for profession of faith and baptism as well as the determination of which offices within a local community of faith require professing membership is left to the community itself. Professing membership, in this model, is upheld as a life decision for discipleship.

Finally, the flexibility offered by this model for membership and for associate membership represents the long-standing commitment of the United Church to be in partnership with all those who share our commitment to "mending the world." It welcomes into our local communities of faith those who share our values and hopes. It witnesses to the church as a community that seeks allies where they can be found for the sake of God's work in the world.

4. Do you prefer Model One (current model) or Model Two (new model) or a different model (please provide some basic details below)? Why?

Please see the next page for how to send in your responses to this study document.

Questions and Comments

Please offer the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee your responses to the following questions and any other comments you think would be helpful in considering the understanding and practice of membership in The United Church of Canada. Please respond online at www.surveymonkey.com/r/membership-model or by sending a hardcopy to the following address:

Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee
The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

If you have any questions, please e-mail TICIFCommittee@united-church.ca or phone

Rev. Dr. John H. Young
Executive Minister, Theological Leadership
1-800-268-3781 or 416-231-7680, ext. 3025

Your response must be submitted **no later than June 30, 2017**, for it to be considered by the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee as it prepares its recommendations on a model for church membership for the meeting of the 43rd General Council in 2018.

1. Does your community of faith adhere to the current expectations of membership in *The Manual*?
 Yes No Don't Know
2. Should the United Church make formal provision for anyone who shares the values and mission of the church to affirm a connection to the church that is different from membership?
 Yes No Don't Know
3. On the spectrum below, where do you believe the church's model of membership needs to place its emphasis? Circle the dot that applies.
Belonging and Participation Belief/Affirmation of Faith

4. Do you prefer Model One (current model) or Model Two (new model) or a different model (please provide some basic details below)? Why?
5. Are there any other comments you wish to make (up to 300 words)?

A Little Information about You

Name of congregation/mission unit/chaplaincy: _____

Presbytery/District: _____ Conference: _____

Location: rural/village town small city urban centre other

If not a congregation/mission unit/chaplaincy, please indicate:

presbytery/district group Conference group theological school other

Is this the response of an individual? yes no

Is this the response of the session or main governing body of a congregation? yes no

Is this the response of another group? yes no

If yes, please specify: _____

If this response is from a group, what is the approximate number in the group? _____

Age of participants (check all that apply) under 30 30–55 over 55