

JOINING THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HADLEY*

How do I become a member?

Here at the First Congregational Church of Hadley of the United Church of Christ, we receive people into membership during Sunday worship. We invite all those who want to join to come forward and make promises about their commitment to God and to our faith community.

To prepare, we hold two newcomer's orientation classes in the weeks proceeding, where you can meet with the pastor and other church leaders, share about your own faith journey, and learn more about First Church, the United Church of Christ, and how our community functions and serves the wider world. If you're interested in joining, please contact the Rev. Thomas Hawkins at revthomashawkins@gmail.com.

Why would I become a member?

When you join our church, you become a voting member. As a member you will vote on the church's budget each year, which members will serve as key leaders, and whether or not to call a new pastor. There are important practical issues associated with being a member, but it's about much more than that.

When you join, you become a part of our community through the act of covenant. A covenant is an exchange of holy promises. In making a covenant, we promise to serve God together. Everyone—new members and existing members—join together as one body, the body of Christ.

What's involved in being a member?

When you join, you tell the community, "I will be here for you," and they promise the same in return. We promise to worship together, study and respond to God's Holy Word, love each other, pray for one another, strive for love, justice, and peace in the world, and contribute to the work of the church by giving of our time, our gifts, and our resources.

Worship is the heart of what we do as a faith community. It is what sends us out empowered to do what God requires of us and restores us when the world has diminished our spirits. As a member we trust that you will keep worship at the top of your commitments, and should some situation make it impossible to be with your church physically, we hope that you will stay connected by prayer and in service.

Serving others is not just a vital part of what we do here at First Church, it is vital to who we are as Christians. We can be the hands and feet of Christ wherever we are, but in joining this congregation, you commit to add your gifts and talents to the unique pool of gifts that keeps

this community of faith going. That could lead you to hand out worship bulletins on a Sunday morning as a greeter, help prepare or deliver meals for Take and Eat, volunteer with our youth group, teach Sunday School, join the choir, lead a Bible study, knit a prayer shawl, or serve on a board or committee. There is no end to the ways you can serve God by serving others here at First Church and beyond.

Stewardship Everyone knows it takes money to keep a church running, and that doesn't mean we know just how much to give. Here at First Church, we don't answer that question for you, but we do encourage you to make it a percentage of your income rather than just a fixed amount. When you take the brave step of choosing to give a percentage away rather than just a number it means that when your income goes up or down, your gift does too, but your commitment remains steady, and that is a great feeling.

The Bible encourages us to give 10% of what we have away. Some give it all to the church, others divide that money among different causes that are all doing God's healing work in the world. Many people set the goal of 10% as something to work toward. We encourage you to allow your giving to develop as your spiritual life develops. Pray on it, increase a percentage point every year, or start out at a high percentage in the hope that you'll never miss what you give away regularly.

We do believe that everyone can give, though. Even the smallest amount of money, time, or energy given away reminds us that we have all received.

We also believe that in giving, we find greater joy than we can ever find in receiving. Happiness does not come from the stuff we accumulate. Joy and fulfillment come in serving and giving to others. It's a part of what it means to be a member. It's also part of what makes membership so meaningful.

*This text was adapted from "So You're Thinking About Joining the Church: A Guide to Exploring Church Membership in the United Church of Christ" by Lillian Daniel.