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## WHAT IS “CHURCH”? *and*, WHERE DO YOU FIT IN? (the beginning of the service)

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This “New Member’s Class” is adapted from our “Order for Receiving Members into Full Membership” as found in our AME Church’s Doctrine and Discipline and in our AMEC Hymnal. This “Course” breaks the “Full Membership Service” into 4-parts, for four hour-long sessions.

At the beginning of the service your Class Leader or a Steward calls your name... **You do not stand by yourself!**

The minister then declares things about what “Church” means (*and these help us to understand “WHAT” the Church is, and, “WHERE” you fit in it*):

### **The Church is...**

- God’s Household
- The Body of Christ, Christ is the Head
- The goal of the Church is to bring everyone into unity with God and His Church

### So, **Church is to provide...**

- Fellowship and Communion (unity)
- Maintenance of Sound Doctrine
- The “Ordinances” of God’s Power... “ordinances” comes up later too, when we get to “Discipleship”.
- Godly admonition and discipline

It is the **Duty** of each Church member is to...

- Promote Peace and Unity
- Bear one another’s burdens
- Prevent others from stumbling
- Seek friendships in the society
- Be steadfast in faith and worship
- To pray and sympathize with one another

The **Privileges** of being a part of God’s Church...

- Hearing God’s Word and encouragement to live holy
- Sharing in the Christ’s ordinances
- Under the care of pastoral ministry
- Enjoyment of the blessings promised in God’s Word “to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10)

### *Topics Covered in this “Service” and in this “Course”...*

1. The Church (This Lesson, Week 1)
2. Your Salvation (Week 2)
3. The AME Church (Week 3)
4. Your Christian Discipleship (Week 4)

### Our Primary Sources... **THE THREE (3) BOOKS**

1. The Holy Bible
2. Our AMEC Hymnal
3. Our Doctrine & Discipline

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## WHAT IS “CHURCH”? ... ***YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS*** (the end of the service, but ... )

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At the very end of the service, when all the questions have been asked and answered, the minister asks the congregation if they know of any reason you should not be part of the Church... ***kinda like a wedding ceremony*** (the Church is God’s “Bride” in Revelation 21:1-2)...

Then (hearing no objections) the Minister welcomes you with ***the right hand of fellowship*** (Galatians 2:9), and declares the blessing: “May God grant that you may be a faithful and useful member of the ***Church militant*** (the Church on Earth) till you are called to the fellowship of the ***Church triumphant*** (the Church in Heaven)!”

- Then the Church Body will follow with the Right Hand of Fellowship (***WELCOME!!!***)

## **YOUR SALVATION, FAITH, AND RELATIONSHIPS (You, God, and Others)**

Continuing where we left off with the Introduction into the “Full Membership Service”, after the Prayers (which tell us a lot about the Church and our place in it), the Minister then begins to ask the “**Candidate**” (the one “**seeking admission**”) Six (6) Questions... These 6 questions and their answers (and what it all means) will make up the rest of these New Member Classes.

The minister asks questions of the one(s) **asking for** (“seeking admission”) Full Membership:

**Question #1:** Do you here in the presence of God and of this congregation renew the solemn promise contained in the **Baptismal Covenant**, ratifying and confirming the same and acknowledging yourselves bound faithfully to observe and keep that covenant and all things contained therein?

*The Baptismal Covenant is...*

- Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the flesh; so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?
- Do you... “Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; and that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; and he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; that he arose again the third day; that he ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and from thence forth he shall come again at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead? And do you believe in the Holy Ghost, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the remission of sin, the resurrection of the body, and everlasting life?” (**The Apostle’s Creed... Our Common Faith with all Christians**)
- Will you then obediently keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life?

➤ **#1 YOUR Answer (if you mean it): I Do.**

**Question #2:** Have you **saving faith** in the **Lord Jesus Christ**? (Do you know you need God? Did you pray to God? Are you committed to being in a relationship with God?)

➤ **#2 YOUR Answer (hopefully): I Have.**

**Question #3:** Do you entertain friendly feelings toward **all** the members of this Church?

➤ **#3 YOUR Answer (hopefully): I Do.**

### The **DOUBLE BLESSING**

- Salvation
- Sanctification

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## ***THE AME CHURCH: Our Historical Beginnings, Our Methodist Roots, What We Believe, How We're Structured... A CRASH COURSE!***

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*Picking up where we left off in the 6 Questions each "Candidate" is asked, and must answer...*

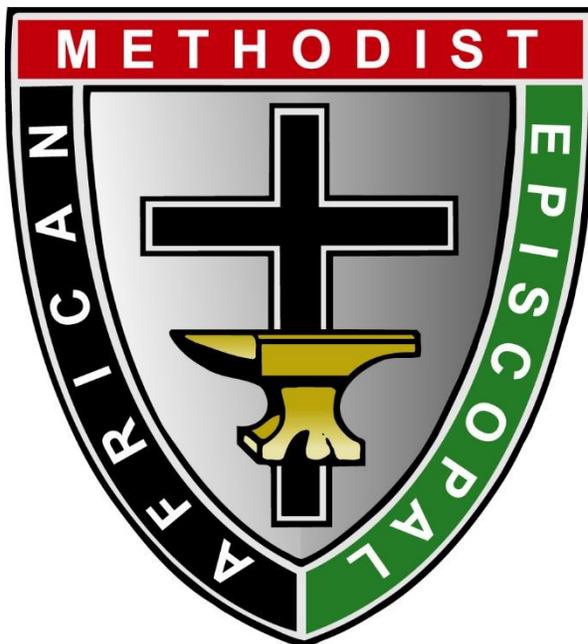
**Question #4:** Do you believe in the Doctrine of Holy Scriptures as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the African Methodist Episcopal Church? (*As summarized here by the Rev. Andrew White, from the "Know Your Church Manual"*)

- I. **THE HOLY TRINITY:** There is but one living and true God. He is the maker and preserver of all things. We experience the one God through three aspects of His personality; namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This threefold aspect of God, we call the Holy Trinity.
- II. **THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST:** In Christ two natures --Divine and Human-- are joined together in one person. In other words, Jesus is truly God and truly man.
- III. **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST:** Christ truly arose from the dead and ascended into heaven.
- IV. **THE HOLY SPIRIT:** The Holy Spirit is of one substance with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is one of the three aspects through which we experience God.
- V. **THE HOLY SCRIPTURES:** The Holy Bible contains all we need to know to be saved. (*Also, 39 OT Books & 27 NT Books*)
- VI. **THE OLD TESTAMENT:** The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; in both Old and New Testaments eternal life is offered to mankind.
- VII. **ORIGINAL SIN:** All men have inherited evil impulses from their ancestors. This corruption of the nature of every man is called "original sin." It goes back to Adam, the first man.
- VIII. **FREE WILL:** Every person is free to choose right or wrong; but even if he chooses to do right, he must have God's help to live a good and holy life.
- IX. **THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN:** We are saved by faith in Christ and by that faith alone. Good works cannot save us.
- X. **GOOD WORKS:** Good works are the fruits of our faith in Christ.
- XI. **WORKS OF SUPEREROGATION:** The belief that one can do more good than God requires is called "works of supererogation." We do not believe in this doctrine. No one can do more than he ought to do or be better than he ought to be.
- XII. **SIN AFTER JUSTIFICATION:** A Christian may depart from grace and fall into sin again. But those who truly repent receive God's forgiveness and rise again to a good and holy life.
- XIII. **THE CHURCH:** The Visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men and women in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered.
- XIV. **PURGATORY:** We do not believe in the idea of purgatory, which is the doctrine that there is a place other than heaven or hell where souls go after death to be cleansed of sin. Nor do we believe in the worship of images, relics and saints.
- XV. **FAMILIAR SPEECH:** Public worship and the sacraments should be conducted in a language the people can understand.
- XVI. **THE SACRAMENTS:** There are only two sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospels: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- XVII. **BAPTISM:** Baptism is the sign of regeneration of the new birth. It marks the beginning of the Christian life. Infants and children, as well as adults, should be baptized. A. The modes of baptism shall be sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. No one is greater than another. B. Under no circumstances shall anyone be Re-Baptized (Re-Christian-Baptism). This is strictly prohibited by the church. C. All peoples shall be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
- XVIII. **THE LORD'S SUPPER:** The Supper of the Lord is a symbol of Christ's suffering and death for us. The bread and wine are not changed into the actual body and blood of Christ; they represent His broken body and shed blood.
- XIX. **COMMUNION IN BOTH KINDS:** Both the bread and the wine are to be given to the people in the Lord's Supper.
- XX. **THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST:** The sacrifice of Christ is for the sins of the whole world, both original sin and actual sin. There is no other satisfaction for sin but that alone.
- XXI. **THE MARRIAGE OF MINISTERS:** The ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law to abstain from marriage. Therefore, it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry.
- XXII. **rites and ceremonies of the church:** It is not necessary that the rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same or exactly alike. Every denomination has a right to adopt and use a ritual of its own, but the rites that have been established by the church should be faithfully observed by its members.
- XXIII. **THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES:** The United States is and ought to be a free and independent nation. All righteous government should be supported and defended by Christians.
- XXIV. **CHRISTIAN MEN'S GOODS:** Christians have a right to own private property. However, every man should give liberally of his possessions to help others.
- XXV. **A CHRISTIAN MAN'S OATH:** Christians should not swear. They may take oath, however, as may be required by the courts of the land.

➤ ***#4 YOUR Answer: I Do.***

**Question #5:** Will you cheerfully be governed by the Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, hold sacred the ordinances of God, and endeavor as much as in you lies to promote the welfare of fellow members and the advancement of the Kingdom of God?

- The Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church... *Our book of Beliefs, Church Laws and Rules, and Liturgy*
  - Our D&D keeps our AME Church History:
    - Began as the Free African Society in 1787
    - Organized into the AME Protestant Denomination in 1816
    - Bishop Richard Allen became our first Bishop; First Church named Bethel (“House of God”)
  - Our D&D gives us our structure:
    - We are governed by Bishops (who are elected) and preside of Episcopal Districts (such as KY & TN, the 13<sup>th</sup>)
    - The Bishop uses Presiding Elders to lead districts and visit local churches at least 4 times a year
    - Pastors are appointed for 1 year over a local society by the Bishop
    - The local church uses leadership & ministries...
      - Stewards, who manage the Spiritual & Financial ministries of the local church, and are appointed by the Pastor for 1 year
      - Trustees, who manage the local church property, and are elected for 1 year
      - Class Leaders, who are the Pastor’s “under shepherds” that help the Pastor keep in touch with the members of the local church and help the members stay connected to the church body.
      - Other Officers, Ministries, and Organizations that work in the church, outside the church, and help train us to be better disciples for Christ!



## A. M. E. C.

- A:** *African*,  
because we were founded by people of African descent.
- M:** *Methodist*,  
our theological roots, describes what we believe.
- E:** *Episcopal*,  
our type of Church government, from God to Bishops to Clergy to Lay
- C:** *Church*,  
because we are the Body of Christ.

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## YOUR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP... *The Methodist Way*

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Picking up where we left off in the 6 Questions each “Candidate” is asked, and must answer... Here we’re still in the middle of answering Question #5 (“Will you cheerfully be governed by the Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, hold sacred the ordinances of God, and endeavor as much as in you lies to promote the welfare of fellow members and the advancement of the Kingdom of God?”) ... We talked about the History, Beliefs and Administrative Structure of the AME Church, but being “AME” means being “Methodist”, and that defines not only “what we believe”, but more importantly our **Christian Discipleship** (meaning, how we LEARN FROM and LIVE FOR our Lord Christ Jesus).

- We have Three (3) Basic Rules (called “**The General Rules**”) for Christian Living:
    - **Do no harm; avoid evil.** [*Don’t Hurt/Harm Others, Don’t Hurt/Harm Yourself*]
    - **Do good.** [*Be Active and Intentional in Helping Others, Showing Kindness, Being Respectful, etc.*]
    - **Stay connected to God** (“Attend to the ordinances of God, sometimes called “the means of grace”).
  - The “**Ordinances**” of God
    - Fancy word for “Rules” and “Decrees”, but essentially they are “*the things that keep us connected to God*”:
      - Prayer (Public, Family, and Private), including Fasting or Abstinence
      - Worship (Public & Private)
      - The Bible (Reading, Studying, and Exhorting), including hearing the Preached Word
      - The Lord’s Supper
      - etc..
  - **Promote** the welfare of fellow members... [*What are you doing for the Church (not the building, THE PEOPLE!)*]
  - **Advance** the Kingdom of God... [*What’s are you doing for God? What are you doing for others? What is your ministry?*]
- **#5 YOUR Answer (Your Commitment): I Will.**

**Question #6:** Will you give of your time, talents and treasure, according to your ability, for the support of the Gospel, Church, poor, and the various ministries of the Church?

- **Time**... *Giving time to God (devotions and worship) and His Church (ministries and fellowship)*
  - **Talent**... *Using your gifts and abilities and ideas!*
  - **Treasure**... *Tithes, Offerings, Conference Claims, etc.*
- **#6 YOUR Answer (Your Commitment): I Will.**

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PASTOR HALE’S DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP...

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**LIVE** • **LOVE** • **LEARN**

For  
Christ

Like  
Christ

From  
Christ