

Membership Handbook



Ardmore

United Methodist Church

Connect to God, one another, and the world

Welcome to Ardmore UMC

This Membership Guide offers information about Ardmore UMC and serves as a guide for members and those seeking membership. As you read this guide, we encourage you to jot down questions and/or concerns that you may wish to raise with one of our staff. As a member, we want you to see yourself not as a consumer, but a fellow servant leader—called to live out our mission of “connecting” through the work of the church.

The Ardmore Mission

Our Ardmore Church Mission statement is *“to connect people to God, one another and the world.”* Connection is about our relationship with God, the practice of community, and the mission of extending God’s compassion to the world.

Connecting to God. Through worship, education, and spiritual formation, we are invited to connect with God; to deepen our relationship, first and foremost, we must embrace the love God has for us.

Connecting to one another is about community. A community of faith is not a collection of strangers, but a fellowship that is responsible for one another. We pray, visit, and help each other in love.

Connecting to the world is about our call to take responsibility for the world beyond our membership. We are called to practice compassion beyond the walls of our church building. This extends to a world

that desperately needs it. We follow in the way of Jesus—actively seeking to embody the love with which we have been loved. This is simple, but the more we study and follow Jesus, the more demanding this mission becomes. **We are called to put compassion into action** by alleviating the suffering of the world. We are also called to the difficult work of *raising compassion to the institutional level*, which is a good definition of **Justice**, thereby helping transform the world into a place where all people have enough, and that there is equal access to the abundance our world provides.

Membership in the Church

Members of a church are not only beneficiaries of its work, but responsible for its health. One vow of membership taken in joining the church is to uphold the congregation by **prayers, presence, gifts and service**. The church is the people, not the building nor its program. As a member, you are the church, responsible in part for its well-being. *The church needs your prayers* as we seek love and justice in the world. We hold each other in heart and mind before God. We care for one another. It is through prayer that we seek to deepen our understanding of God's specific call for our community.

The church needs your **presence**—not just your name on its roll. We hope that if and when you are unable to come to worship or participate in a study group, you will do so in another church, making worship and study a spiritual discipline. You may be fine while being away from the church, but others at church may need you.

The church needs your gifts, both financial and physical. A church budget for the current year is always available to you. We are blessed by financial gifts from faithful members; these gifts have sustained us as our membership and giving decreased. You may not have much to give at this time, but we hope as your financial health improves you will *take ownership for your ministry with Ardmore and be disciplined about giving*. We encourage people to tithe when they can—giving 10% of their household income. Tithing is the biblical principle and spiritual discipline of prioritizing God with our resources. It

may seem like a lot but remember that 90% of our income is ours to use freely. For those with an income to tithe, no matter how meager, the principle of tithing is an “equal sacrifice for unequal amounts.” For those who struggle financially, perhaps we can tithe our time and energy.

The church needs your service. While the call of faith always exceeds our individual ability, we hope you will find at least one place of real commitment to help implement our mission. We have needs for leaders in all areas of the church, but *the place you serve should come from your gifts and talents.* You may be asked to serve somewhere in the church but hope that you develop a sense of call about what you do. Frederick Beuchner once said: “Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” As a member we want you to find something that both meets a need in the community and gives you great joy. While some find a profession where they live out their call (clergy, musicians, educators, missionaries, etc.) **all Christians are called.** We discover our call by listening to what gives us joy, and what concerns in the world we hear.

Worship @ Ardmore UMC

Worship is central to the formation of faith in the church community. Worship is the primary opportunity to connect to God, but it is also an action of community. Because most worship involves people facing one direction with leaders on the platform, we may think of worship as something we watch others do. But in worship, it is God who is watching all of us. While scripture, preaching, and music are presented to us, we are all active participants, in prayer, reflection and singing.

Our 10:00 AM Service in the Sanctuary leans into **Traditional Worship**. While this service is often quiet, and a break from the many screens that pervade life. Prayers and liturgy are read from the bulletin, Scripture is selected from the Revised Common Lectionary, hymns sung from the hymnal, preaching from the pulpit, the Sanctuary Choir sings anthems, the Bell Choir rings, and of course the Noack Opus 87, our sanctuary organ installed in 1978 whose volume can cover a multitude of vocals sins...so sing boldly!

11:15 AM Contemporary Worship Service is more casual. It takes place in the Chapel and is primarily led by our worship band. The music was written more recently, but our worship leaders have a wide selection of music. Whether songs from contemporary, non-denominational churches, traditional songs played with a relaxed feel, or secular songs with spiritual themes, this service will have your toe tapping and you singing along. The atmosphere is laid back and welcoming, but with the same thought-provoking exploration of the gospel.

What will my children/youth get out of Church?

The Kids & Family ministry meets on Sunday mornings for children (Pre-K – 5th Grade) and their families. Parents & kids experience community worship together. Faith comes alive in a way that's fun, silly, sometimes messy, and full of joy. Expect the following:

- **Sing and Dance Together:** Lively worship songs celebrate God's love.
- **Bible Stories Come to Life:** Bible adventures told in interactive, hands-on ways.
- **Get Creative:** Crafts, games, and messy activities explore faith with all the senses.
- **Grow Together:** Kids and grown-ups worship side by side, learning, laughing, and building faith together.

At Kids & Family Ministry, it's okay to be loud, ask big questions, and make a joyful mess - all while discovering how much God loves us.

Sunday Mornings at 10AM and 11:15AM in Room #215

During the Summer we meet outside for the "Prayground!"

Ardmore CONNECT Youth Group

Our youth group is a welcoming community that provides a place where everyone belongs! On Sundays, students in 6th through 12th grade gather to grow in faith, build relationships, and have fun. Each week, youth dive into engaging discussions and Bible study, play group games, and, of course, eat! The youth celebrate holidays and special life events together. The Ardmore Youth Group offers opportunities to serve others and take part in multiple group trips throughout the year. A host of dedicated

adult counselors from within the church support and encourage students as they navigate life and faith together. **(Sunday Afternoons from 3:30PM - 5:30PM in Room #217)**

Through The Week School

For 60 years, Ardmore has served families by providing a quality preschool for children in the Through The Week School (TTWS). Close to 100 children are given a jump start to their school years in an environment that is caring, spiritually enriching, and educational. Generations of children have grown through our preschool. TTWS is Ardmore's longest running mission project.

Why should I become a member of the Church?

Many churches use familial language to talk about their community. But "family" has often meant that you must either be blood related or at least believe and behave like everyone else. A new sense of the word *family* is this: *the community that always welcomes you*. You do not have to be a church member to be part of the Ardmore family.

Membership is a way to commit ourselves to others, to share in the responsibility of caring for people as they go through crises, and to guide our call of ministry together into the future. In becoming a member, you not only claim the community as your family, you also give the church an opportunity to claim you. Membership allows people to take responsibility for one another. We need people who are committed to our mission, who will care for one another in times of need, and help support the whole church with time and money. While many non-members support the church through giving and service, membership is another step toward taking responsibility for the community of faith. Members can serve in leadership capacities and help make the decisions needed to keep our mission alive and relevant. Your membership enriches our congregation, bringing us the gift of your presence.

How do I join?

After reading this guide, we ask *prospective new members* to attend a **Next Steps Meeting** (scheduled monthly) or arrange a meeting with the Pastor. These gatherings will give you an opportunity to discuss any

questions you might have. This also provides an opportunity for the Pastor to connect new members to others with similar concerns/interests. You don't have to wait—call the Pastor! There are **three ways people join the church** in the United Methodist denomination:

1) **Full Membership** means just that—able to receive care from, and take responsibility for, all areas of church life. Some people join as 2) **Affiliate Members**, keep their membership in another United Methodist church, but participate and worship at Ardmore. This is often convenient for college students. 3) **Associate Membership** is similar: people keep full membership in their home church of another denomination, while worshipping and participating in the Ardmore Congregation. (While many associate and affiliate members actively serve on work areas and committees, only full members can serve in certain leadership roles with a vote on church matters).

If you have been a baptized member of another denomination of the Christian faith, we accept your membership with a simple transfer. (During the ***Ritual of Church membership***, you will be asked *to be faithful to the United Methodist Church*). If you have never joined a church, or need to be baptized, you will enter with a *Profession of Faith (and be asked other questions)*. People join throughout the year. We ask everyone joining to attend both services for the *Ritual* (10 & 11:15 AM), so everyone gets an opportunity to meet and claim their new family members.

Ready To Serve?

Someone once said that when it comes to church, *Don't give people something; give them something to do*. Someone else said that churches should never refer to members as volunteers, because all Christians are disciples, and therefore are all ministers. The nature of the church's mission always stretches us beyond ourselves. We are always looking for servant leaders to expand and strengthen our mission. Below is a list of current programs, committees, groups and individual areas of service:

Committees - Trustees, Church Council, Congregational Care, Worship, Stewardship, Finance, etc. One committee, **Mission Engagement**, not only oversees our financial support of local, national and world missions, but also provides hands-on opportunities for the congregation to serve locally.

Food Pantry/Clothing Closet - On the first and third Thursdays of each month, a large group of both members and community volunteers gather to operate a food pantry, clothing closet, and serve a hot meal to people in need. Much of our food comes from the 2nd Harvest Food Bank. This is a gift to the community, and a practical ministry of love. Even if you are unable to participate regularly, we encourage you to take time to come see the church in action. There are plenty of jobs to be done.

Regular Ministry Areas - worship ushers greeters, communion stewards, liturgists, choir, serving communion/visiting the homebound, youth ministry, children's ministry, office helpers, etc.

A Community of Welcome & Care

A number of our church members serve as *Stephen Ministers*. **Stephen Ministry** is an in-depth program that trains lay people in the art of caring for one another. If you ever feel the need to talk with someone, you can always turn to the Pastor; but Stephen Ministers are well trained in deep listening and provide caring, supportive relationships. Times of crisis, change, loss, stress, loneliness—these are moments when it is important to have conversations with someone.

The **Congregational Care Team** is a group that meets quarterly for ongoing education about giving care to others. This group is made up of church staff, Stephen Ministers, people delivering communion and visiting the homebound, leaders of Good Grief, funeral stewards and bereavement team members.

Good Grief is a program that aims to help people embrace the journey of grief. Grief is a sign of the love we have for someone we have lost. It is also an opportunity to grow in faith as we reach out to God and our community for spiritual support. Good Grief groups meet weekly for 10 weeks (times may change in Fall/Spring).

Some History of Ardmore UMC

In 2024, our church celebrated 100 years of ministry in the Ardmore community. In 1924 a new church was organized by Methodists who belonged to other downtown Methodist congregations, holding the first service of the *Ardmore Methodist Episcopal Church* in October 1924. The site (which was the highest point in town) was selected and graciously contributed. A temporary hut was constructed as a place to meet, while the Sanctuary building was completed in 1925.

The congregation has been a steady presence in the Ardmore neighborhood. Our **Through The Week School** for Pre-K children just celebrated 60 years of assisting families with a quality, Christian community of care for children, and a jump start for their ongoing education. Generations of scouts have passed through Ardmore United Methodist Church. Behind our Sanctuary and Education building, a brick building called “the hut,” is the center for Boy Scout Troop # 749, the oldest, active Troop in Forsyth County. On Monday evenings, the church is full of many Troops (Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Brownies and Girl Scouts), all raising new leaders for the next generation.

In the church-growing-decade of the 1950's, when it was the center of both community and entertainment, Ardmore had classes for every grade level; and at one time eight adult Sunday School classes (some which had between 50 and 100 active members). These classes were a primary community for families, giving care and support to each other.

The women of the church have always been at the center. Today, the **United Women in Faith** (formerly UMW) has three circles, groups that meet regularly for study and fellowship, and to support missions. At one time Ardmore had 15 UMW Circles and a legendary Garage Sale. United Methodist women have been sponsoring missions around the globe for decades.

In 1959, the “Methodist Men” were organized as a chartered fellowship at Ardmore. **United Methodist Men** have long been active in providing service within the church: cooking/serving meals, working around the building, leading mission trips, and of course holding the infamous Country Ham Supper. The UM Men still meet six times a year and serve when called upon, raising funds through an annual sale of pine needles to support the church and local projects.

Since the 1940s, Ardmore has had an organized **Methodist Youth Fellowship**. This is a community for young people to learn, grow spiritually, support one another, and of course, have fun. Over the years, they have held live nativities, retreats and summer camps (Elk Shoals, Camp Tekoa, Lake Junaluska), pool parties, and confirmation classes.

What is a Lighthouse Congregation?

In recent years, the United Methodist Church went through a difficult split. This was not the first time in Methodist history. The growing, worldwide movement to include the LGBTQ community into every facet of society entered the church as well. In 2023-2024, the disaffiliation process led to 25% of the churches leaving the United Methodist denomination, primarily over the issue of human sexuality. These splits happened in many mainline denominations, most recently in the UMC. Beginning in 2023, many churches were allowed to take a congregational vote over whether to disaffiliate from the UMC, or not. In most churches, the vote was split by a slim margin, causing a lot of pain for church members. Our Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church responded by designating some of the churches that remained with the UMC as **Lighthouse Congregations**.

Ardmore completed a training to receive this designation in 2023. We seek to actively welcome United Methodists that have felt as if they lost their church in the split and are seeking a new United Methodist church home. Over 20 people have joined Ardmore in the past 3 years from nearby disaffiliated churches, providing us with many seasoned disciples and new leadership. As a Lighthouse Congregation, we hope this will be one step among many in our journey of welcoming people into our church.

What We Believe

As United Methodists, we celebrate many common beliefs found in other denominations of the Christian faith. The United Methodist Church values a diversity of theological views under essential beliefs. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, liked to quote a Christian maxim from the Moravian tradition: *“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, tolerance; and in all things, charity.”*

The United Methodist Church is not a creedal church, abiding by one statement of faith alone. Theologian Paul Tillich once said, “Trying to say something about God is like painting a bird in flight.” We use a number of Christian creeds to express the diversity of theological understandings about God, human beings, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and our relationship to God and the world. Below are two creeds found in the back of our hymnal: The Apostle’s Creed (historic) and The Statement of Faith by the United Church of Canada (more contemporary). Notice the differences and similarities in their language:

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God
the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead and buried,
the third day he arose from the dead
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and
the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

**who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

**to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.**

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Which of these creeds reflects the tradition of the Christian faith in which you were raised? Which one reflects your faith now? What questions come up for you as you compare them?

Nowadays, many people are seeking refuge from rigid doctrines and narrow theology. We are all “people in process,” and hopefully, people in progress. No one knows all they need to know; no one has unlocked all the mysteries of faith. In the process of becoming more fully who we were created to be, we grow in knowledge and in the strengthening of our trust in God. St. Anselm once defined theology as “faith seeking understanding.” For our faith is in process, dialogue with others is essential to deepen and expand our understanding. We need one another on the journey of faith. As one church member noted: “I tried to be spiritual by myself; it doesn’t work.” Others often have a perspective that we need to take our next step forward in the journey of faith. At Ardmore, we are working to create opportunities for rich dialogue around issues of faith and the Scripture.

Our Roots in Wesley's Theology

Most United Methodists know a little about our historic roots in John Wesley. A quick examination of his theology reveals a rich resource for reflection. Wesley was not an original thinker, but he was a great organizer of ideas. Wesleyan scholars have developed a model of his approach to faith, using **Scripture**, illumined by **Tradition**, affirmed by **Experience**, and confirmed by **Reason**. These four foundations of faith have been called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

In Scripture, we hear the first, inspired accounts of the historic people of faith, most importantly their witness concerning Jesus. The Bible is the most controversial literature in the world, and yet the source of comfort, hope, correction and illumination. When the Bible does these things for us, we affirm it as the “word of God.” But the writing of Scripture has a history with many influences, and some antiquated social norms. For Wesley, the witness of the biblical writers needed to be accompanied by other sources for the faith. By Tradition, Wesley primarily meant the writings of early church fathers (yes, they were almost all men). However, much has changed since Wesley's time. Whether tied to marginalized communities, or from a more global perspective, traditions are still developing. By Experience, Wesley referred to both our religious experiences and common-sense wisdom acquired from life; but again, our modern-day experience provide rich perspectives that can help shape our faith. In Reason, Wesley did not mean hard and fast scientific rationality, but rather orderly, reasoned ideas (Wesley's thought was Pre-Enlightenment). While Wesley did not incorporate

the rise of scientific methods, we cannot ignore them. It is in the dialogue between these four sources that Wesley developed a balanced theological approach. Perhaps at the heart of Wesleyan thought is “the dialogue of ideas,” an active faith seeking better understanding.

For Wesley, Grace was central. ***Grace pervades all understanding of the Christian faith as the undeserved, unmerited, loving action of God.*** He understood this divine grace to work in three ways: Prevenient, Justifying and Sanctifying Grace. ***Prevenient Grace***, the grace that comes before; this is the loving action of God that precedes our awareness. Even before a religious awakening, many people see in hindsight how God was at work in their lives. God’s love comes to us before we ask for it, before we even know our need of it. God loves us first. (This understanding of God’s Grace is central in our understanding of infant baptism. For United Methodists, God is at work in baptism, loving us before we are conscious, or even able to choose God’s love for ourselves). ***Justifying Grace*** is the grace that forgives; transforming action takes place when the believer makes a decisive change. Justifying Grace is the moment of conversion, what many refer to when they say, “I’m saved” or “I was born again.” This religious experience “justifies” or “puts us back in right relationship” (think of the justification feature on most computers—the words are in right relation to the page). People in recovery often speak of a *moment of clarity*. Such moments of transformation may be instant & dramatic, or gradual & cumulative. But notice—it is still Grace; the emphasis is still on

God's action. God reaches out, prompts, and guides us in making a decisive change.

When the moment of Justifying Grace occurs, **Sanctifying Grace** immediately begins. God's grace continues to work in people, nurturing and drawing us into wholeness. The word "sanctification" literally means *holiness* (*Sanctus* is Latin for "Holy"). While Wesley used the phrase *Christian Perfection* to speak of sanctification, this is often difficult for people to swallow. There are no perfect people. But our task of growing toward wholeness—back into the divine image of God in which we were created—is our life journey. The process of our becoming whole never ends—so perhaps we can speak of this as *Sanctifying Grace*. Borrowing from the language of recovery, Sanctifying Grace is "working the steps." We can cooperate with God's grace, work alongside God's Grace, discerning the movement and direction of the Spirit at work, in and around us. "God's mysterious power works through grace."

Note: With Wesley's understanding of grace, the historical debate of "works vs. grace" is resolved. For those who claim justification, they are held accountable—taking responsibility for the grace that God gives. On the other hand, we must not fall into the temptation of pride by trying to earn our salvation through good works. With Wesley's theological insight, "good works" are done through us; God's grace is working through us—not our own doing. The focus is on God's grace, not our own human effort. Grace is central, happening in the ways Wesley describes (and perhaps in other ways) at different times throughout life: one grace, at work in various ways and times.

Notes & Questions



Edited September 2026

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