

Discover Discipleship and Membership at Highlands Church, Bella Vista, Arkansas

*"If you abide in my word,
you are truly my disciples." - John 8:31*

*"By this all people will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another." - John 13:35*

Compiled and written by Rev. Rick Sitton
April 2026

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE BELIEVE

We are so glad that you are considering membership at Highlands Church, Bella Vista. You may have just started worshipping with us, or you may have been coming for a while. It is not an accident, but God's providential grace that has brought you to a church that strives to be a "Caring Community of Faith and Fellowship."

We believe there is nothing more important in your life than your personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers by grace through faith. (John 3:16)

We believe the ultimate mission of Highlands Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We believe nothing is more important than this great commission. (Matthew 28:16-20)

We believe disciples of Jesus keep the great commandment: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

We believe disciples of Jesus keep the commandments of God summarized by Jesus: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:34-40) Therefore, our mission is to "LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, MAKE DISCIPLES."

We believe Jesus calls us to make a difference as His disciples in our community by doing "all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." (John Wesley)

We believe our mission field is best described by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, when he proclaimed: "The world is my parish." As an affiliate congregation of the Global Methodist Church (GMC), we join together with brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe because the world is our parish. Our world starts at home with our friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors, but we believe the whole world needs salvation that Christ alone offers.

What you believe matters. Every statement of this introduction to "Discover Discipleship and Membership" begins with "We believe." Your beliefs determine what you will do in life. Your beliefs define your character, your life purpose, and your daily life. Everything you do is predicated on what you believe. You believe "clothes make the man." So, you wear clothes. We are grateful. What you believe matters. It's why we must hold fast to a biblical, Christian worldview in an age of secular humanism.

What we believe as a church matters! This is one reason we often recite a creed, such as the Apostles' Creed, during worship. We believe every church member should know our core doctrines and have a clear understanding of our membership vows. With that goal in mind, I encourage you to read the book "Christian Faith and Doctrine: An Annotated Catechism for the Global Methodist Church", by Dr. David A. DeSilva. The book is available at the church office. It is a sound explanation of the GMC catechism. You can access the entire GMC catechism at this link:

<https://globalmethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Transitional-Discipline.20211010-1.pdf>

The Book of Doctrines and Discipline of the Global Methodist Church contains paragraphs that delineate vows of baptism and vows of membership in two different sections (par. 316 and par. 319). There are a total of five vows taken upon baptism and five vows taken for membership into the local church. Some of the vows are redundant, but all are important. Why are they redundant? Because the vows of baptism may be given to anyone at any time and do not require someone to join a local church. Baptism is not a rite of passage into a local church, but a holy sacrament that represents being united with Christ; therefore, you become part of the universal church. Methodists accept the baptism of anyone who was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we do not rebaptize anyone, but we affirm your baptism as an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace that marks or identifies you as part of the Christian community. Jewish people use circumcision as a mark of identification with their faith community, while Christians offer the sacrament of baptism. Neither circumcision nor baptism can save anyone who does not place their faith in Jesus the Messiah. So, if you have already been baptized, you may join the church by simply affirming the membership vows. If you have not already been baptized, then it will be our joy to celebrate this holy event publicly as you profess your saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Vows of Baptism

BAPTISMAL VOWS. In faithfulness with early Christian practice as well as the Wesleyan tradition, those wishing to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism within the Global Methodist Church shall first be asked the following questions:

Do you renounce the devil and all his works, and reject the evil powers of this world?

To renounce means to reject or repudiate. The Bible describes the world we live in as “this present darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). The darkness of sin (evil) entered the world, and death through sin, but Jesus, the Light of the World, calls you out of darkness and into the light of His kingdom. John Wesley said it was the responsibility of Methodist preachers to preach salvation in Christ alone by proclaiming that every soul needs to flee “the wrath to come,” which is God’s judgment upon sin. The only way to be saved from that wrath of God and from our sin is to believe and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

The second question before baptism is asking someone if they repent of sin, believe in Jesus, and confess Jesus as Lord (God) and Savior.

Do you repent of your sin, turn to Jesus Christ, and confess Him as your Lord and Savior?

To repent means to turn around and start going down the right path. Repent means admitting to God and to yourself that you are living your life outside God’s boundaries (God’s will) in thoughts, words, and deeds. To repent is to agree with God that you have sinned and are on a wide path that leads to destruction. To repent is to begin walking a narrow path, following Jesus with your whole life.

Baptism candidates are asked three more questions, and since these three questions are asked in similar ways in the membership vows section, we will dive deeper into those vows within the section on membership vows. Here are the last three baptism questions:

Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? (See Membership Vows question # 3)

Do you accept the responsibility to resist evil, injustice, and oppression by the grace and power of God? (See Membership Vows question # 2)

Will you obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in them all the days of your life by the grace and power of God? (See Membership Vows question #4)

Those who present candidates for Holy Baptism who are unable to answer for themselves (such as infants) will also be asked this question: Will you nurture these children (persons) in Christ's Holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, profess their faith openly, and lead a Christian life?

We believe three commitments are being made at a child's baptism.

- (1) *The Lord has given the parents this precious gift of life; therefore, baptism is a time to give thanks to God who is covering this child with prevenient grace. The Lord is committed to blessing you and your children as you live out your faith in Christ.*
- (2) *The parents make a commitment to bring their child up in the Christian faith so that their child may confess saving faith in Christ at some point in their childhood or certainly to affirm their faith in Christ through confirmation classes.*
- (3) *The church makes a commitment to support parents raising their children in the Christian faith by offering Christian education classes, such as Sunday School classes.*

The congregation is then asked to affirm their commitment to support the baptismal candidate in the faith. Baptismal candidates (or those presenting candidates unable to answer for themselves) are then asked to affirm their faith as contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the Apostles' Creed.

Do you believe in God the Father?

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

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

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, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.]

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

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.]

The Apostles' Creed is a trinitarian creed that outlines basic tenets of Christian theology. After affirming belief in basic Christian doctrine, having repented of sin (if the person is of age or of sound mind to repent), and having confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord, crucified and risen, a person may be baptized. We offer three modes of baptism that have biblical roots. We don't believe you are saved by water, but by grace through faith in Jesus. Being baptized is an act of faithfulness to Him and represents that you are cleansed from sin through Christ's atonement and part of the Body of Christ. The three modes of baptism are as follows:

- (1) *Sprinkling with water: "I will **sprinkle** clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you." (Ezekiel 36:25)*
- (2) *Pouring: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will **pour** out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18, Joel 2:28-29)*
- (3) *Immersion: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38, Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16)*

Vows of Membership

¶ 319. VOWS OF MEMBERSHIP. In addition to taking the vows of baptism (¶ 316), those wishing to become professing members of the Global Methodist Church shall be asked the following questions before being received into the church:

- (1) **Do you believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit?** The Trinity.
- (2) **Do you confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as your Lord?** *This vow finds a parallel in the vows of baptism: Do you repent of your sin, turn to Jesus Christ, and confess Him as your Lord and Savior?*
- (3) **Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures?** *This vow finds its parallel in the vows of baptism: Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?*
- (4) **Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of your life as a faithful member of Christ's holy church?** *This vow is comparable to a vow in the section on baptism: Will you obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in them all the days of your life by the grace and power of God?*
- (5) **Will you be loyal to Christ through Highlands Church and do all in your power to strengthen its ministries through your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness as Christ's representative in this world?**

The Last Vow is the ONLY Local Church Membership Vow

The only local church membership vow is the last one. It begins by asking you to be loyal to Christ above all. The local membership vows are the expectations we have of every church member. All of us are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, we joyfully work to strengthen the ministries of the church by doing our part in the body of Christ. We are not all hands. We are not all feet. We are all parts of the body, and we need each other to carry out the ministry of Christ and His church. So, let's be crystal clear about what we expect a member of the church to do in faithfully living out their vows.

(1) Pray

We ask that you pray for one another (Galatians 6:1-2) and for our ministries, staff, and clergy.

(2) Be present

How can you possibly fulfill your holy vows to be a member of the church, but are not present and involved in the life of the church? New studies are showing that people believe once-a-month attendance for worship is being faithful, but worshiping only a few times a year can never be true faithfulness if you can attend worship. Be present. Become involved.

(3) Give (gifts)

Let's be plain spoken. This vow means financial giving. We believe in tithing. Every year we have a stewardship campaign, and we teach and hope members will tithe. If everyone tithed 10% of their annual income as a way of expressing love for God and gratefulness for His blessings, then our church would have more than enough resources for ministry. Sometimes, members may consider leaving the church a sizable gift through estate planning. We would love to meet with you to share how you can support your church through Endowment Funds that will continue to bless the Lord's work on earth while you are in heaven. This vow also means to use your spiritual gifts to serve the Lord in everything you do.

(4) Serve (service)

Jesus said, "I did not come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many." Find a way to serve in church ministries or outside the church walls. Giving your utmost for His highest in service provides rewards in this life and the life to come. Serving the Lord includes using your spiritual gifts, skills, and experience to excel in ministry. We believe every member should be involved in ministry, and we have many ministries that need your time and talent. We also believe that every disciple is a minister for Christ and should find a place in their community or through their vocation to be the salt and light of this world.

(5) Witness (for Christ as His ambassador for His kingdom)

Witness. As a child of God, everything you do reflects upon Jesus. We witness with our lives. Every social media post is His post. Every encouraging word to others is His encouraging word. A witness is always looking for a way to tell others about the most important relationship they have in the entire world - Jesus. Always look to build relationships with all kinds of people so that you earn the right to witness to your faith in the Lord in His time.

How is Highlands Church organized?

As a member congregation of the Global Methodist Church, we follow *The Book of Doctrines and Discipline of the Global Methodist Church*. The main organizing body of the local church is the annual charge conference. Throughout the year, the executive agency of the church is the Church Council, and the executive officer of the church is the pastor. All committees, ministries, staff, and clergy are under the authority of the Church Council and the annual Charge Conference (also called *the Church Conference*).

Highlands Church has Five Administrative Committees:

1. The Board of Trustees is the equivalent of a Board of Directors for a nonprofit organization. The Trustees have stewardship over all property, assets, and endowments. The Trustees also have the responsibility to maintain, insure, and protect the church through established policies.
2. The Staff/Parish Relations Committee acts like a human resources department who oversee the work of all staff and clergy.
3. The Finance Committee compiles an annual budget, raises funds to support church ministries and staff, and oversees all aspects of financial stewardship.
4. The Nominations and Leadership Formation Committee seeks to involve every member in ministry, and find places of service in church leadership.
5. The Church Council oversees the work of all committees and ministries and is under the authority of the annual charge conference and *The Book of Doctrines and Discipline of the Global Methodist Church*.

Highlands Church has three Ministry Teams (see Acts 2)

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. Nurture | Caring ministries, spiritual formation groups, teaching and worship. |
| 2. Outreach | Ministries reaching outside our walls to help and support others. |
| 3. Witness | Ministries related to sharing the gospel and winning people to Christ |

N.O.W. is our acronym for the three ministry teams, and the acronym reminds us that the Holy Spirit is at work through His church to make a difference as His disciples right NOW.

How do I become involved in a ministry, class, or band at Highlands Church?

We have a member involvement coordinator who will help you find your place in the life of the church. We hope you will make new friends and find a place to serve the Lord through our ministries. There are three essential ways to become involved.

1. Care Groups. Our church is organized through care groups and has been since its founding in 1988. Every member and all active constituents (those who come, but have not yet joined) are assigned to a Care Group. The group meets once a month for fellowship and to build friendships. In these groups, we get to know each other, pray for one another, and have some fun to build lasting friendships. You really get to know your brothers and sisters in Christ in a Care Group. Each year, the Care Groups are reformed so you start all over with a new group. This ensures none of our groups become a clique and this helps you to make new friends.

2. Classes. Our church has classes that meet on Sunday morning for bible study and fellowship. We also have other groups that meet to study the bible as well as a Methodist Men's Group and a Methodist Women's Group that help you build friendships as we serve together.

3. Bands. A band is formed when 3 to 5 people meet regularly for spiritual accountability and to share life as Christian friends. From the beginning of the Methodist movement in the 1700's, bands have been the key method (in Methodism) to support believers growing deeper in their walk with Christ and encouraging one another to walk in the Spirit.

Grace and Peace
Pastor Rick Sitton