

RECORD OF FAITH JOURNEY: VENTURE IN DISCOVERY

This resource is designed as a guide for exploring the “Record of Faith Journey” form required by the Book of Discipline. This is a new form for the 2005-2008 quadrennium.

United Methodists, drawing upon our inheritance from John Wesley, teach and glory in the understanding that salvation is a lifelong journey rather than a once-and-done event.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit is made available again and again.

- It is *preventive*: It is the grace that goes before we do anything and prepares us to be ready to see, hear, and know God.
- It is *justifying*: It is a grace that places us in a right relationship to God, giving us a confidence in God’s salvation promise and power.
- It is *sanctifying*: it is a grace that works in us to make our hearts and lives ever more perfect with the love of God.

Baptism for Wesley, therefore, was a part of the lifelong process of salvation. He saw spiritual rebirth as a twofold experience in the normal process of Christian development -- to be received through baptism in infancy and through commitment to Christ later in life. Salvation included both God’s initiating activity of grace and a willing human response.

From the Introduction to *By Water and the Spirit*

The risen Christ calls us to live this love out in all relationships, including the ways we keep track of one another in the church. Christians are accountable to one another for ongoing participation in the life of the community. When people are baptized or confirmed, we pledge ourselves to

...surround these persons
... with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their trust of God,
and be found faithful in their service to others.

We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.

From “The Baptismal Covenant I” in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 33.

One of the tools we have for this is a practical one: **we keep records** as reminders of who God has given us in this community of mutual affection and care.

One of the new records called for by the 2004 *Discipline* is the “Record of Faith Journey” (RFJ). This is unlike anything United Methodists have kept in the long history of keeping records related to members. For that reason, we invite you to discover the potential of this record form as an opportunity for ministry and pastoral care.

This study may be used:

1. in groups of pastors and membership secretaries learning about the new form and how it may best be used.
2. in groups of those preparing for confirmation, parents bringing a child for baptism, or people transferring from another church.
3. with a Sunday School class of youth or adults as a short-term experience.
4. with groups such as Covenant Discipleship groups and class leaders to engender deeper practices of pastoral care within the baptismal covenant.

Resources you will need:

- Bibles
- *2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual* (Cokesbury)
- Sufficient copies of the Record of Journey form for each person. (Cokesbury)
- If you want to use projection, use the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. Print it out using the “Note Pages” option in the “print” dialogue box so that you can be guided in anticipating the next slide and have notes for your comments.
- A bell or some other signal for convening the group

Setting:

1. Have coffee or other beverages and refreshments for hospitality.
2. Be ready to offer several places where individuals and pairs can break out for more individualized work.

Number of sessions:

You could have one or two sessions, depending on the duration of the sessions. It could be done acceptably in one two-hour session. Or it could be done in two one-hour sessions.

What follows is a guide, and it is set up as two distinct sessions. You as leader should adjust the time and content to the context and people you are leading. We hope that you as a leader of this session will find enough content here (and in the PowerPoint presentation) to work with to prepare a teaching-learning session appropriate for your group.

Session One or Part One:**Introducing the Session**

Tell a story of learning about a grandparent’s (or an aunt’s or uncle’s) childhood and how knowing something concrete about him or her more strongly connected you to him or her. My dad used to tell of his great uncle who fought in the Civil War and was imprisoned more than a year. When this man came home, he was so unkempt that his own mother didn’t recognize him. When he asked if he could have lodging for the night, she said he could sleep in the barn, to which he replied, “Well, that’s a fine way to treat your own son!” My dad told that story over and over. I think it both gave him pleasure and gave him a sense of connection. (Don’t tell *this* story, for surely there is a good story

in your family experience.) The important thing to communicate is how story and details make us real. God does not make “Anybodies”—God makes “Whobodies.”

The Record of Faith Journey Forms

Hand out the RFJ forms to the group and indicate that this will be an opportunity to learn about the form and to actually complete it with personal information. The flow of the session will allow time for being more attentive to the deeper story that underlies the facts and information that the lines on the form call for.

Ask participants to fill out the top portion calling for name, address, and so on.

Bible Study

Explore Romans 16:1-16 (17-20) and how this passage illuminates the way the church values people, their stories, and the relationship with them.

This is the most extensive list of names of believers in the New Testament. Ask the group to say what we know about Paul and these individuals Paul remembers and greets. What could be put on their journey of faith form? (If the group is more than 6 or 7, ask them to divide up into groups of 4 or 5 for this exercise. Do some reporting back of any new awareness or insights.)

Methodist Practice and Heritage

Remind the group that United Methodists have a heritage from the early practices of Methodism of “watching over one another in love” and of attending to the stages of faith that mark significant moments of spiritual formation.

Such a society is no other than “a company of [persons] having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.

(From “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies” in the *Discipline 2004*, ¶ 103, p. 72)

The societies of Christians that John Wesley formed met weekly to inquire about their practice of discipleship. They prayed for one another, inquired about those absent and checked in with them if necessary, and were mutually accountable for very basic rules: not doing harm, doing good, and using the means of grace. The “General Rules,” as they called them, are still printed in *The Book of Discipline*, ¶ 103, pages 72-75, as a model and a reminder that we are still expected live together in mutual accountability for these basic disciplines for all who live within the baptismal covenant.

Invite reflection on what it means to watch over one another and what the pluses and minuses of such a practice would be in your congregation. If you have Covenant Discipleship Groups in your congregation or in one of the churches in your district, you might want to invite one or two group members to share what such mutual oversight and accountability means to them and their church.

Look at the Record of Faith Form

Review briefly the different sections of the RFJ form so that all in the group see how it invites awareness of

1. Our entrance into the faith community—the church—in baptism.
2. Our response in professing the Christian faith.
3. Ways of leaving the relationship with the local faith community.

Note also that the form recognizes that change happens in people's lives, sometimes leading to ending the relationship as we know it by death, transfer, removal, or withdrawal. Don't labor any of this; there will be time to explore the form more extensively as the exploration progresses.

Discovering Our Baptism as God's Gracious Act

Ask participants to fill out the "Baptism" section of the form. Then invite people to recall the details they know about their baptism—who was there, what was done, how much water was used, any stories they have been told about that sacramental moment. Allow time for them to complete the section and then invite them to

1. Share what they know or remember about their baptism.
2. Talk about they would like to know about their baptism.

Be sure to affirm the baptismal covenant as strong and full of grace regardless of what they know or remember. Remind participants that baptism is a sacrament; that is, it is an act of God and thus never needs repetition. Baptism establishes a covenant relationship between ourselves and God – hence the name “Services of the Baptismal Covenant.” See page 32 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

[Homework]

If there will be more than one session, invite participants to find out more about their baptism by contacting family members and the church where the baptism happened, searching family photo albums, finding the certificate and reading it, and so on.

Profession of Faith: The Acceptance of Our Side of the Covenant

Begin with giving a mini-lecture on the meaning of professing membership. Be sure to make the following points:

1. Salvation is a lifelong process that always involves cooperation between humans and God – God gives grace; we accept and respond; God gives more grace, and we again and again respond to this continuing self-giving of God.
2. Professing faith is an ongoing and grateful response. It is a lifelong response to the gift of grace and inclusion in the church as the body of Christ and witness to the coming reign of God. See 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶ 215.2, 216.1, 218 and 220.
3. When an individual makes a profession of faith, he or she becomes a Professing Member and is held accountable by the life and discipline of the church. See 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 221.

Ask participants to complete the “Profession of Faith” section. When they have completed it, again ask for sharing in the whole group or in breakout groups what they recall of that time or moment in their lives. Ask them, “What was God doing in your life that led you to professing the Christian faith as your own? Whom did God use to encourage or challenge you? What circumstances led up to this moment? In what ways were you aware of this being a moment of commitment? What did you sense you were committing to?”

As leader, reflect what you have heard and offer some observations about profession being a response to God’s gracious initiative in the context of the church’s life and mission.

Note briefly that baptized membership is also transferred to another church when we move. Ask if any made their first profession of faith in a local church other than the one they are now a member of and later transferred to another church. Clarify that that is what the third, fourth, and fifth lines in that section are for. **Note** that these lines would be filled out only if a professing member transferred to a church other than the one in which he or she professed the Christian faith.

Mention the “Current Chronological Number” in the upper left-hand corner of the RJF. That will always be the number for the church each is currently a member of; the chronological number does not follow the person from one church to another. Reference the “Permanent Church Register” where each new member, baptized or professing, is entered and given a “Chronological Number.” (See *2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual*, pages 22-23.

Change and Our Journey of Faith

Prepare and give a mini-lecture on the lifelong nature of membership in the body of Christ, the church. Reaffirm that our faithfulness to our side of the covenant relationship may change. We may change or our circumstances may change. You may want to elaborate, making the following points:

1. The grace that is received and celebrated in baptism continues all through our lives.
2. Membership is relationship in a living community of people seeking God and living the gospel in the world (see 1 Corinthians 12).
3. Change happens; and sometimes we lose connections due to death, hurt, disobedience, separation, relocation, and even spiritual growth.
4. Acknowledgement of changed relationship needs to be recognized honestly in the records that churches keep and in our expression of care. See 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶ 235-242.
5. Restoration to professing membership is a way of enacting and acknowledging God’s grace at work See 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 242.
6. God is always faithful to the divine side of the covenant.

Invite participants to share moments they recall of change in circumstances in their own lives that tested or even broke relationships with the church. Keep the tone oriented to the

grace of God, but risk allowing people to share hurt, failure, or disappointment. If prayer or touch is appropriate to enact healing, be sure to act in pastoral ways—in ways of “watching over one another in love.”

If you plan for two sessions, this may be a good stopping point. Close with prayer and remind participants of their “homework”—discovering or recalling more about their baptism and making notes on significant moments in their spiritual formation.

Session Two or Part Two

Significant Moments in Spiritual Formation

- If you did not break and are continuing, ask the participants to take a stand-up break, get some refreshments, and use the restrooms.
- If you are beginning the second session, welcome the group and offer a brief prayer appropriate to the time of day. (See *UMH*, page 876 for morning prayer or 878 for evening prayer.)

Introduce this section or session using these or similar words: “Significant Moments in Spiritual Formation” is an optional part of the Record of Faith Journey. *The Book of Discipline* (2004; ¶ 230.1) does not require that this part be filled out or that anyone should be pressured to provide this information. So let’s think of it as a doorway that is there and that you are invited to go through. If you decide you want to complete this portion, it offers a space to share highlights of your spiritual journey as part of the record of the church. Let’s think of it as an opportunity to discover and witness to the grace of God by thinking back over your life. Like the story of Abraham and Sara marking significant moments with altars and “journeying on by stages” (Genesis 12:9) or the popular piece about “footsteps in the sand,” sometimes we stop to look back over our lives, see important turning points when God’s grace wooed us, called us, changed the course of our lives, or lifted us from self to service. Or we look back and see how another person or a church class or group – which is still the grace of God at work – or a seemingly non-religious moment opened up a whole new sense of our vocation as baptized Christians. Someone said that “coincidences” are God’s way of remaining anonymous! Christians are called to name the mighty acts of God and to declare them.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10, NRSV

If we have a story to tell, we need to tell it. Others need to hear it. This is one meaning of professing.

Now invite participants to do some writing in the section “Significant Moments in Spiritual Formation.” If you suspect that there is any hesitation about what is meant by “spiritual formation,” you might want to give a very brief interpretation of the phrase. Here we are not talking about a specialized form of guidance in spiritual disciplines, although that may be included. Rather, “spiritual formation” here has to do with moments in our lives when we experienced God’s grace for change and growth and we responded. You may want to give out the sample of a partially completed RFJ form or use the PowerPoint slide of the form. (See the end of the PowerPoint presentation.)

Remind participants that the RFJ is a record that will be kept by the church, so they should not include details that they are not comfortable with the pastor, church membership secretary, or church secretary knowing.

Offer two ways of writing in this section of the form, depending on whether each person prefers to work quietly alone or prefers to reflect by talking to someone else. Encourage a kind of listing of summary details—a faith shorthand. If you have a projector, you could show an example; or hand out an example, such as:

- My mother reading from *Hurlbut's Stories of the Bible* before naps
 - Baptism—age 12
 - Summer camp in 1958
 - Invitation to Discipleship in 1962
 - A summer morning when my whole life changed
 - The Solitude and Survival retreat in 1983
1. Ask for those who would like to work in solitude to go and find a quiet place to work. Tell them that you will ring a bell in about twenty minutes that will signal that they should return.
 2. Ask for those who would prefer to be with someone else for this part to pair up and interview each other. Taking turns to interview, each can make notations about the significant spiritual moments on that person’s RFJ. Suggest that they each take only ten minutes, so that each has time to share.

Ring the bell and call them back to the group room.

Ask the group to imagine the ways the RFJ could be used to strengthen pastoral care, mutual ministry, and deepening the capacity of the church to tell “our story.” List and discuss. You might add, if it was not observed, that the RFJ can be updated. A youth might have only one or two significant moments that he/she shared with the pastor in conversations about being ready to be confirmed, the first profession of faith. Years later, when transferring to another church, he/she may have a number of additional moments to add when updating the RFJ in the group of new members.

Additional Records and Previous Church Membership/Affiliation

Inward journey—outward journey: the Christian life is both. The deep inner work of grace is made real in the outward and social dimensions of life. External relationships and circumstances are the Spirit’s playground.

In this section, the exterior aspects of one’s life can be recorded. Note there are connections here with other records in the United Methodist record-keeping system, such as the Record of Baptisms, Family/Household Roll, Constituency Roll, Record of Marriages, and even the Record of Death.

Invite participants to record other important moments, relationship,s and church affiliations of note. Allow a little time for this and move on.

Racial Ethnic Identity

This line appears here on the RFJ and on the Permanent Church Register.

Give a mini-lecture on the significance of this aspect of record keeping. See the *2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual*, page 5.

Invite comment and discussion on recognizing and recording the racial ethnic identities that make up the Body of Christ. In some settings, this will not stir any questions or concerns. In others, it may provoke concern about how such information is to be used or why it is important. You could remind the participants that keeping this aspect of records is not new.

Uses, Reporting, and Filing (This is optional for the session and perhaps most appropriate is settings where pastors, membership secretaries, and church secretaries are learning about the RFJ).

Prepare and give a short talk on the RFJ and why it was created, as well as how it is to be used in pastoral care, deepening a sense of relationship, and in completing Table I each year. As sources for this preparation see:

- “FAQs on Membership and Records” in *2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual*, especially pages 11 and 12.
- Commentary on the Record of Faith Journey of *2005-2008 United Methodist Membership Records Manual*, paage 18.

Pastors, membership secretaries, and other church staff may use this information to fulfill their administrative and pastoral responsibilities in relation to all baptized and professing members of the local church. While certain items of information on the form are required by the *Discipline* (see paragraph 230.1 for what is required), others are specifically meant to allow members an avenue of sharing their faith story and witness with the pastor and church as they move by stages along their faith journey. **The intent behind this new form is that members see membership as a faith journey in relationship to and within the Body of Christ as an organic, living community. At the same time, it is important to remember and to remind members that they need only share**

information that they are comfortable with sharing. It will take time to learn how best to use this form as both a resource for record keeping and for ministry opportunities.

Invite the participants to share ways they see that the RFJ form could be used to enhance relationships and to build up the faith-sharing community. Ask them to imagine settings and ways of where church members could be invited to not only fill out the form, but also to engage it and the spiritual and sacramental realities it asks us to discover and share.

Concluding

- Thank the participants for sharing in this venture.
- Invite their feedback in a simple oral way, asking first; “What was helpful and encouraging in this exploration?” Then ask, “What would have made it better for you?”
- Read or sing a hymn such as Charles Wesley’s “Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love” (UMH 566) or “Pues Si Vivimos/When We Are Living” (UMH 356).
- Close with the Lord’s Prayer prayed by all, or offer an extempore prayer.
- Dismiss the people with a blessing.

This study outline was prepared by Daniel Benedict, Worship Resources Director, The General Board of Discipleship, in consultation with Beth Babbitt Borst and Scott Brewer of the General Council on Finance and Administration and Gayle C. Felton, author of the study edition of [By Water and the Spirit: Making Connection for Identity and Ministry](#) and of [This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion](#).

“Record of Faith Journey: Venture in Discovery” Copyright © 2005 The General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, PO Box 340003, Nashville TN 37203-0003. Worship website: www.umcworship.org.

This resource may be printed, copied, distributed, reprinted in church bulletins or newsletters, or otherwise used for nonprofit local church worship or education with the inclusion of the copyright citation and General Board of Discipleship Worship website as its source. It may not be used for profit or republication without prior permission. It may not be reproduced on another website, though other websites are welcome to link to it.