

## UMC Seeker to Member Journey

### Study Background

United Methodist Communications partnered with What They Think Research to conduct eleven 90-minute in-home interviews the week of December 9<sup>th</sup> 2019. The goal of this exploratory research was to better understand the journey from seeker to member of a UMC.



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The path to finding a United Methodist Church is part of a bigger journey of finding oneself: pursuing personal growth, defining beliefs, and living an authentic life.
2. The value a United Methodist Church delivers is recognizing and including all; creating a safe space to ask questions and form personal beliefs without answers being dictated or opinions being judged, and; its commitment to community outreach.
3. Seekers are not as likely to be looking for a certain denomination as they are for a like-minded community.

### COMMON GROUND

- All Seekers proactively sought out a church. They found the church. The church didn't find them.
- Seekers locate a United Methodist Church via referral from a trusted source, proximity to home, or the rainbow image.
- The United Methodist Church is viewed as a place where people can explore their own beliefs, discuss the hard questions and form their own opinions.
- There is a sense of familiarity about the United Methodist Church they attend. It brings back memories of the church where they grew up -- the service, the music, the rituals, the smells.
- Seekers become regular attendees at United Methodist Churches for 3 main reasons:
  1. Clergy and congregants go out of their way to make them feel seen and welcomed – included.
  2. The pastor inspires them.
  3. They support and want to become involved (now and/or later) in community service.
- The United Methodist Church makes regular church goers feel like a member. The result is that there is no clear benefit or immediate motivation to formally become a member. Most regular church attendees say they plan to become members eventually.
  - *“We consider ourselves members even though we haven't joined yet. Membership is a formalization of a commitment that has already been made. The commitment we have is the important part.”*
- Church acceptance of LGBTQ is an indicator of a good fit. “That is a basic principle that gives you an idea of their other beliefs.”



### **Seeker's say The United Methodist Church....**

- Meets me in my journey
- Is a safe place to ask questions
- Is a place to explore the questions
- Is where everything is coming together
- Is where it's OK to be me
- Is a place to grow
- Is a place that brings me joy
- Completes the circle
- Helps me accept myself
- Is a faith space where I am able to ask questions
- Is where something exploded in me
- Is a beautiful mess
- Is where no one hides anything
- Is where nothing is off limits
- Is where it OK to say I Don't Know
- Is where we have real conversations
- Is where I am on the right path
- Is where they accept the good, the bad and the ugly