

# Something to Pray About

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By Cindy Sears – September 2011

**“Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors”**

What does the logo on the United Methodist Church symbol mean?

Humans like to collect in cliques or groups. Then we limit membership in the group. One reason for that is we never truly believe that there is enough to go around, to share with everyone. Plus, our pride makes us want to feel “special.” How can we be special if anyone can be a member of our group? And we crave security. Fearing what we do not know or understand, we create barriers—to keep danger and strangers, who represent the unknown and possible danger, out.

The Christian church has not been immune to these pressures. Throughout the ages, some churches have been less than generous with the message of hope that is supposed to be available to ALL MEN. (“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” –John 3:16) The Israelites were the chosen people of God, and so are we. But, unlike the Israelites, who God called to separate themselves from the other nations, we have been commanded by Jesus to preach the good news to all people—to persuade the world to join us by accepting the redemption found only in Christ Jesus. See Matthew 28:19-20—the Great Commission.

Methodists believe that all people are called by God to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and become children of God (“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” John 1:12; see also John 3:16). We believe that ALL are capable of giving in to the love of Christ and being saved (prevenient grace). Therefore, we open our doors, our hearts, and our minds to all people. This does not mean that we “wink” at sin or condone sinful behavior—even when it is condoned and rampant within the culture (such as, fornication, gossip, adultery, homosexual acts, cheating on one’s taxes). Nor do we accept every wind of doctrine. We stand by the Word of God. But, we do not put artificial barriers up to keep people out of church and unable to learn what great things God has done for all people. Barriers we refuse to accept or erect are:

1. *Race* – all humans are created in God’s image and, therefore, all are called and welcomed by God into His family (See Genesis 1:27). We allow all people—“red, yellow, black or white,” –to enter our worship centers and hear the gospel.

2. *Economic status* – rich, poor, bankrupt, homeless—our doors are open to all. We do not show favoritism (See James 2:1-7).

3. *Dress/Appearance* – People come from various cultures, and they get ‘caught up’ in the prevailing culture that leads them to wear some unusual clothing, jewelry, or skin and hair ornamentation. Some of it may be shocking to our sensibilities, or immodest by our standards. We don’t expect people to change before coming to Christ. We don’t turn people away because they don’t follow our “dress code” norms. Much of dress and appearance is superficial, and therefore, not to be used to pre-judge people or keep them from coming to church.

4. *Background* – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23).” Your past sins and mistakes are no reason to stay away from church or from Jesus Christ, who is your only hope of redemption. As our Lord did, so do we; we welcome all those who seek forgiveness and transformation in Christ Jesus. We present the gospel message to everyone and let the Holy Spirit do His work.

5. *Political beliefs/memberships* – Governments are here by God’s permission (see Romans 13:1-7) to help maintain order, but they are not our ultimate ruler. God is our King, so politics should not determine who can or cannot worship and serve the Lord with us.

6. *Gender* – In Christ, there is no male or female (Galatians 3:28), in the sense that both men and women need redemption and both are called to serve the Lord. Men and women have innate differences that make us more suited to certain activities or help us to do the same activities differently, but we are not barred from any work or worship the Lord calls us to do.

7. *Origin* – What your parents did or did not do; the religion you once followed; the country or culture you were raised in, will not bar you from participation in our church services. We do not exclude people born out of wedlock, those of mixed “races,” or former Catholics, Buddhists, Jews, etc.

8. *Personality* – We are all different. The Lord made us so. Sanctification makes us more like Christ; but we do not become “cookie-cutter” Christians. Christians retain their unique personal characteristics. They just become purer and more holy and more useful to the Lord’s work as God transforms them.

9. *Physical looks* – Fat or thin, wrinkled or smooth, dark or light, straight noses or hooked, tall or short, crinkled hair or bald, whole or maimed —everyone is welcome in Christ and beautiful to Him and, therefore, to us.

10. *Intellectual development* – An Einstein or not, you are welcome here. You do not have to be smart by the world’s standards. You only need to know that Jesus loved you enough to die for you, and be willing to accept that gift with whole-hearted gratitude.

So, as a part of the United Methodist Church, open your hearts, open your minds, and open the doors, and let the people come. Invite them all to taste the glorious grace of God in Christ Jesus. Amen!

