

***The Igniting Ministry Campaign:***  
**National Audience Research**

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The Perspectives and Preferences of  
Unchurched & Marginally Churched Adults, Ages 25 to 54

Research conducted by:  
**Barna Research Group, Ltd.**  
Ventura, California

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## Introduction

This report provides an overview of the results of a research study conducted by the Barna Research Group on behalf of United Methodist Communications (UMCom), the communications headquarters of the United Methodist Church. The primary goal of the research was to assess potential attributes of the United Methodist Church that could be used for the Igniting Ministry campaign. Our job was to determine which attributes are the most attractive, most believable, and most unique among the campaign's target audience.

The target audience for the research was defined as individuals who are ages 25 to 54; who are either marginally churched or unchurched; and who do not typically attend a United Methodist Church (referred to as the "UMC target" or the "target audience" throughout this document). Also, all interviews were conducted within Zip codes in which a United Methodist church is located. That helps to ensure that the people we spoke to are within driving distance of a United Methodist church.

In total, the research consisted of a qualitative phase of 32 depth interviews among a national sample of individuals who meet the criteria for the target audience. The depth interviews were conducted in September 2000 and allowed us to better understand the perspectives and attitudes of the audience, as well as to pre-test their reactions to a number of "test" attributes.

The second phase of research was a quantitative piece of research. It included 400 telephone interviews among individuals who qualify as members of the target audience. The interviews (for both the qualitative and quantitative phases) were drawn from a random sampling of individuals who qualify for the research. That means that we called a list of computer-generated phone numbers (to eliminate the bias of non-listed numbers) and determined whether a person was an eligible part of the sample based upon a series of screening questions.

The results of the research are accurate to within  $\pm 5$  percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. (A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in the Appendix entitled *Research Methodology*.)

The section following this introduction, the **Data Analysis**, contains a written description of the findings. The Data Analysis is followed by the **Marketing Considerations** which contains a more subjective interpretation of the data. The final section contains several appendices, including: 1) a description of the **Research Methodology**; 2) a guide to understanding survey results (**Estimating the Accuracy of Survey Results**); and 3) a copy of the questionnaire used in the research. Separate binders contain the cross-tabulated data tables for the project. These tables may be consulted for additional information or for clarification, as needed.

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# Data Analysis

## 1. Evaluating the Potential Attributes of the Campaign

### The Attributes

We evaluated a total of 18 attributes. We created those 18 attributes by splitting six dimensions into three potential statements a church might make to describe itself. The six dimensions which, in very general terms, describe some of the distinctives of the UMC were as follows: (1) thoughtful; (2) caring, outreach-oriented; (3) relational; (4) accepting, inclusive; (5) open-minded; and (6) relevant.

These are the actual statements that we evaluated through this research...

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*Question: These days, a church may have specific strengths that make it attractive to people. I would like to read you strengths that some churches have I would like to know how appealing you think that would be in a church, assuming it was located near you.*

*(First/Next), suppose that a church (READ ATTRIBUTE)?*

***dimension: thoughtful***

- a. has inspirational preaching
- b. encourages people to embrace a thoughtful faith through solid biblical teaching
- c. inspires the heart and stretches the mind

***dimension: caring, outreach-oriented***

- d. is part of a worldwide movement of churches that is making a difference in the world
- e. supports hospitals and children's homes around the country
- f. is very active in helping people in your community who are hurting and in need

***dimension: relational***

- g. has people who deeply care for and support each other
- h. is a place where people could make deep personal friendships
- i. helps to strengthen families by ministering to children, teenagers, and parents

***dimension: accepting, inclusive***

- j. includes people from all financial walks of life, from the well-to-do to the very poor
- k. includes people from diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds
- l. accepts everyone because it believes that God cares for everyone

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***dimension: open-minded***

- m. welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs
- n. believes in the basic principles of Christianity and the Bible, but encourages its members to dialogue about issues when opinions differ
- o. does not require that attenders embrace a specific set of religious beliefs

***dimension: relevant***

- p. deals with real-life issues that people like you face
- q. encourages people to understand their faith and to put their faith into action
- r. encourages people to make a commitment to Jesus Christ that affects their everyday lifestyle and decisions

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## **Topline Results**

Although there are myriad ways in which we can slice and dice the data, these are some of the highlights (see Table 1.1):

- The most appealing attributes were...
  - \* *helping people in the community* (35%, claimed this description would make them extremely likely to attend that church; Attribute f);
  - \* *accepting everyone because God cares for everyone* (32%, Attribute l);
  - \* *strengthening families by ministering to children, teens, and parents* (31%, Attribute i).
  
- On the next tier were such statements as...
  - \* *a church where people deeply care for and support each other* (29%, Attribute g);
  - \* *includes people from all financial walks of life* (26%, Attribute j);
  - \* *deals with the real-life issues that people like [you] face* (25%, Attribute p);
  - \* *inspires the heart and stretches the mind* (25%, Attribute c);
  - \* *supports hospitals and children's homes* (24%, Attribute e)
  
- There are several important notes of caution that emerge based upon the data. First, notice that even the best-rated attribute generated strong interest among just one-third – 35% – of respondents. (Experience suggests that the top-box response – e.g. those who are extremely interested in the statement – is traditionally a more reliable way to measure “real” interest in the context of survey research.) Moreover, few people in the target audience claim that these statements are particularly unique – that is, most people would say that many of these statements generally “sound like any other church.” This suggests that even though we have determined that some statements are comparatively more appealing than others, it is still going to be a difficult task of actually motivating target individuals to visit a church, based solely on the messages.
  
- Although it is a minority of respondents who said so, the attributes which people would have the hardest time believing appear to be a worldwide movement of churches which is making a difference in the world (Attribute d); a church that welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs (Attribute m); a church that encourages dialogue when opinions differ about theological matters (Attribute n); and a church that does not require members to embrace a specific set of religious beliefs (Attribute o).
  
- Note that three of the four statements which people had a hard time believing were elements of the “open-minded” dimension. Not surprisingly, many respondents were comparatively likely to say that these “open-minded” attributes are unique descriptions of a church – that is, that they have rarely, if ever, heard a church described in these ways.
  
- In terms of other unique attributes, many respondents felt that the following statements did *not* sound like other churches they had heard of before: a church that inspires the

heart and stretches the mind; a church that is part of a worldwide movement of churches that is making a difference in the world; a church that includes people from diverse cultural traditions and ethnic groups; a church that accepts everyone because God cares for everyone; and a church that deals with the real-life issues that people like themselves face.

**Table 1.1: How the Potential Attributes Stack Up**

**Key:**

*EL* – % who said they would be extremely likely to attend this type of church

*TL* – total % who said they would be at all likely to attend this type of church

*HTP* – % who said it was hard to picture a church like this

*VU* – % who said this attribute was a very unique description of a church

*TU* – total % who said this attribute was a unique description of a church

	<u>EL</u>	<u>TL</u>	<u>HTP</u>	<u>VU</u>	<u>TU</u>
<i>dimension: thoughtful</i>					
a. inspirational preaching .....	14%	64%	10%	12%	30%
b. embraces a thoughtful faith .....	17%	56%	14%	10%	23%
c. inspires heart/stretches mind .....	25%	72%	10%	20%	47%
<i>dimension: caring, outreach-oriented</i>					
d. worldwide movement/making a difference .....	14%	47%	23%	18%	47%
e. supports hospitals and children’s homes .....	24%	69%	8%	14%	38%
f. helps people in your community .....	35%	78%	4%	19%	36%
<i>dimension: relational</i>					
g. deeply cares for and supports each other .....	29%	72%	9%	12%	35%
h. people could make deep personal friendships .....	22%	66%	11%	10%	33%
i. strengthens families (kids, teens, and parents).....	31%	70%	10%	10%	30%
<i>dimension: accepting, inclusive</i>					
j. people from all financial walks of life .....	26%	72%	11%	19%	36%
k. diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds .....	18%	67%	13%	20%	50%
l. accepts everyone because God cares for everyone.....	32%	78%	7%	20%	39%
<i>dimension: open-minded</i>					
m. welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs....	12%	55%	20%	27%	52%
n. encourages dialogue when opinions differ .....	15%	57%	19%	21%	49%
o. does not require a specific set of religious beliefs.....	8%	33%	31%	30%	59%
<i>dimension: relevant</i>					
p. deals with real-life issues that people like you face .....	25%	73%	10%	16%	43%
q. wants people to understand faith and put it into action .	21%	64%	10%	11%	29%
r. affects lifestyle and decisions via commitment to Christ.....	21%	57%	11%	11%	23%

**Choosing One**

After evaluating each of the 18 attributes, respondents were asked to select one specific attribute (out of the 18) which they felt would be most appealing to them personally. Table 1.2 lists the percent of respondents who selected each of attribute as their “favorite” description of a church. Also, respondents were asked to identify why reasons why people liked that particular attribute. In Table 1.2, callout boxes list the most common reasons mentioned by respondents for each of five attributes.

**Table 1.2: Which Attribute is Most Appealing?**

**Key:**

*% who said they find each attribute most appealing of the 18 attributes*

	<i>% of target</i>	<u>why select this attribute?</u>
<i>None of them appealing/not sure.....</i>	<b>12%</b>	
<b><i>dimension: thoughtful .....</i></b>	<b>13%</b>	
a. inspirational preaching .....	6%	
b. embraces a thoughtful faith .....	6%	
c. inspires heart/stretches mind .....	6%	
<b><i>dimension: caring, outreach-oriented.....</i></b>	<b>13%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ that's the way it should be</li> <li>➤ Christians should help</li> <li>➤ that is what the church is supposed to do</li> </ul>
d. worldwide movement/making a difference .....	1%	
e. supports hospitals and children’s homes .....	6%	
f. helps people in your community .....	16%	
<b><i>dimension: relational.....</i></b>	<b>15%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ it's important to include all family members</li> <li>➤ because I have kids</li> <li>➤ because kids are our future</li> </ul>
g. deeply cares for and supports each other .....	6%	
h. people could make deep personal friendships .....	7%	
i. strengthens families (kids, teens, and parents).....	10%	
<b><i>dimension: accepting, inclusive.....</i></b>	<b>15%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ everyone should be welcome</li> <li>➤ it's better when a church cares for people</li> </ul>
j. people from all financial walks of life .....	9%	
k. diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds .....	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ everyone would be treated equally</li> <li>➤ get to interact with people from different backgrounds and beliefs</li> </ul>
l. accepts everyone because God cares for everyone.....	3%	
<b><i>dimension: open-minded.....</i></b>	<b>17%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ able to reach a broader spectrum of people</li> <li>➤ shouldn't blindly follow others' interpretations</li> <li>➤ we should accept everyone's personal beliefs</li> <li>➤ gives a chance to understand other's beliefs</li> <li>➤ want to be in a place where I can be myself</li> <li>➤ we can all worship one being or God</li> <li>➤ there wouldn't be strict rules</li> </ul>
m. welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs....	14%	
n. encourages dialogue when opinions differ .....	2%	
o. does not require a specific set of religious beliefs.....	3%	
<b><i>dimension: relevant .....</i></b>	<b>10%</b>	
p. deals with real-life issues that people like you face .....	5%	
q. wants people to understand faith and put it into action .	4%	
r. affects lifestyle and decisions via commitment to Christ.....	5%	

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Overall, the most frequently selected descriptions were as follows:

\* 16% of respondents selected Attribute f – a church that is very active in helping the needy in the community. People told us that they liked this description because they believe that Christians should help the needy or that they feel that a church is supposed to be doing that kind of work.

\* 14% of the target picked Attribute m – a congregation that welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs. This attribute was commonly selected by the people who were the least churched, that is, those who had not attended a church in at least several years. Supporters of this attribute felt that such a church would be able to reach a broad spectrum of people; that it would provide a chance to understand other people's beliefs; that there wouldn't be strict rules; that it would foster an environment where people can "be themselves" and accepting of others; and that it would facilitate everyone worshipping God in their own way. Others reasoned that such a church would mean that a person wouldn't be "blindly following" other people's interpretations or beliefs.

\* 10% of the audience said that their favorite attribute is a church that strengthens families by ministering to children, teens, and parents (Attribute i). People who liked this attribute were either raising kids themselves, or said they appreciated this attribute because they believe that kids (and families) are so important.

\* 9% of the target audience indicated that their favorite attribute was a church that includes people from all financial walks of life (Attribute j). The motivations for choosing this description were uninspired: respondents said that they picked this particular attribute because everyone should be welcome to attend a church or because it's better when a church cares for people.

\* 8% of the target audience liked Attribute k best of all – which was a church that includes people from diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds. Respondents explained that they liked this attribute because it would show that everyone, regardless of race, would be treated equally, and because it would allow people to interact with others from different backgrounds.

**Segmentation Analysis**

In this section, we examine the characteristics of the people who gravitate toward each of the 18 attributes.

**Table 1.3: Segmentation Analysis – Selected Attributes**

The characteristics of people who were more likely than average to say that they would be interested in attending a church given a particular description.

	<i>subgroups which are particularly fond of this attribute</i>
<i>dimension: thoughtful</i>	
c. inspires heart/stretches mind .....	women; residents of South; committed Christians; heavy TV viewers; Protestant non-mainline
<i>dimension: caring, outreach-oriented</i>	
f. helps people in your community .....	women; non-white; single (never married); residents of the Midwest or Northeast; non-leaders; heavy TV viewers; uncommitted church attenders; talk radio listeners
<i>dimension: relational</i>	
g. deeply cares for and supports each other .....	non-whites; parents; searching for meaning; committed Christians; stressed out; excited about the future; heavy TV viewers; uncommitted church attenders; feel that churches have exceeded their expectations
i. strengthens families (kids, teens, and parents).....	women; ages 40 to 54; parents; divorcees; middle-income households; committed Christians; stressed out; heavy TV watchers; uncommitted church goers; feel that churches have met their expectations
<i>dimension: accepting, inclusive</i>	
l. accepts everyone because God cares for everyone.....	non-whites; parents; low-income households
<i>dimension: relevant</i>	
p. deals with real life issues that people like you face .....	committed Christians; uncommitted church attenders; feel that churches have met their expectations

**Comparing Dimensions**

We created a score for each of the six dimensions by averaging the responses for each of the component attributes. For instance, the score for the "thoughtful" dimension is based upon the scores for each of the three attributes in that dimension – has inspirational preaching (Attribute a), embraces a thoughtful faith (Attribute b), and inspires the heart/stretches the mind (Attribute c). Table 1.4 depicts these average scores for each of the six dimensions.

**Table 1.4: How the Dimensions Stack Up**

Average scores for each of the six dimensions we assessed. Each

**Key:**

*EL* – % who said they would be extremely likely to attend this type of church

*TL* – total % who said they would be at all likely to attend this type of church

*HTP* – % who said it was hard to picture a church like this

*VU* – % who said this attribute was a very unique description of a church

*TU* – total % who said this attribute was a unique description of a church

	<u>EL</u>	<u>TL</u>	<u>HTP</u>	<u>VU</u>	<u>TU</u>
dimension: relational .....	27%	69%	10%	11%	33%
dimension: accepting, inclusive .....	25%	72%	10%	20%	42%
dimension: caring, outreach-oriented .....	24%	65%	12%	17%	40%
dimension: relevant .....	22%	65%	10%	13%	32%
dimension: thoughtful, inspirational.....	19%	63%	11%	14%	33%
dimension: open-minded.....	12%	48%	23%	26%	53%

Here are the key findings from this exercise:

- Messages that address the *relational* aspects of a church and those attributes focused on the *accepting/inclusive* nature of a church appear to be slightly more appealing than any of the other four dimensions we assessed. Overall, these two dimensions generated strong interest in at least 25% of respondents and total interest in 7 out of 10 respondents.
- The following dimensions appear to generate similar levels of appeal: a congregation that is *caring and outreach-oriented*; a church that is *relevant* to everyday life; and a church that emphasizes a *thoughtful faith*.

- 
- When it comes to descriptions that are "hard to picture" (i.e. lack believability in the minds of respondents), the least believable dimension appears to be a church that is "*open-minded*." This dimension also registered as the most unique way of describing a church.
  - As for other unique descriptions, many respondents felt that a church that is "accepting and inclusive" was a unique way of describing a church. Slightly less unique was the dimension "caring and outreach-oriented." Churches that are described as "thoughtful," "relevant," or "thoughtful" were not considered unique by more than one-third of respondents.

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## 2. The Profile of the Target Audience

### Audience Size

The research achieved a qualified incidence of 24% – which means that about 1 out of every 4 U.S. adults fits the definition of a qualified respondent. (See the Introduction for a complete description of the survey qualifications.) Overall, U.S. Census Bureau estimates tell us that 58% of the U.S. adult population is age 25 to 54. This research suggests that about half of those individuals fit the criteria of being unchurched or uncommitted to their current congregation. In macro-terms, there are probably about 45 million to 50 million adults nationwide who fit the definition of the UMC target audience.

### Demographics

In terms of demographic characteristics (see Table 2.1), UMC target households earn about \$40,000 – which is slightly higher than the national average (\$38.8K). Half of the target are men; half are married; and half have children under the age of 18. In comparison with national norms for all U.S. adults, the only significant difference on those three items is the fact that the UMC target, probably due to its age, is more likely to be a parent than is true of the national average (48% to 37%).

In terms of ethnicity, about 73% of the UMC target is white; 11% are black; and 10% are Hispanic – which are essentially on par with national norms.

However, in comparison with the national average *for other adults ages 25 to 54*, we discovered that they are comparatively less likely to be married or to have children: among U.S. adults ages 25 to 54, 63% are married and 53% have children (which compares to 51% and 48%, respectively, among the UMC target). Compared to other 25- to 54 year-olds, the UMC target makes nearly \$4,000 less annually.

Overall, 27% of respondents said that they live in an urban area; 41% live in a suburban community; and 30% of the target audience resides in rural parts of the country.

**Table 2.1: Demographic Comparisons**

How the UMC Target Compares to National Norms, including the norms among people the same age.

<i>demographic indicators</i>	UMC target	US adults 25-54*	all US adults*
• median income	\$40.1K	\$43.8K	\$38.8K**
• men	49%	50%	49%**
• white	73%	72%	70%**
• college graduate	44%	40%	24%**
• married	51%	63%	53%
• have children under 18	48%	53%	37%

\* source: Barna Research 2000 national tracking study, unless otherwise noted

\*\* source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Putting it all together.** The fact that the UMC target earns comparatively less is probably explained by the fact that they are significantly less likely to be married, which diminishes the collective earning power of the audience. Although half of these individuals are married, recognize that the UMC target is 19% less likely to be married and 9% less likely to be parents than is true among their peers.

### **Psychographics**

The majority of the UMC target would say that they are “excited about the future” (78%), that they are “seen as a leader by others” (63%), and that they consider themselves to be “financially comfortable” (60%).

UMC target individuals are slightly less likely than the national average to say that they are "financially comfortable" (60% versus 66%, respectively) – which seems reasonable given their slightly lower earnings than is true for other adults their age. However, the UMC target was more likely than their counterparts nationwide to suggest that they are "stressed out" (46% to 38%, respectively) and to say that they are "searching for meaning in life" (38% to 34%, respectively).

When asked about recent volunteer activity, we found that about 1 out of every 3 adults in the UMC target (33%) have volunteered to help an organization in their community during the last month.

**Table 2.2: Psychographic Comparisons**

	UMC target	US adults 25-54*	all US adults*
<i>Does this describe you accurately...</i>			
• excited about the future	78%	81%	76%
• seen as a leader by other people	63	67	63
• financially comfortable	60	64	66
• stressed out	46	38	35
• searching for meaning in life	38	34	36

\*source: Barna Research 1998 national tracking study

### **Media Habits**

We briefly assessed the media habits of the UMC target. We discovered that more than half of the target audience (56%) has listened to talk radio in the last month.

Not surprisingly, TV viewing is nearly ubiquitous: just 4% of the target audience said that they never watch television. Two-thirds of the UMC target watches TV every day (68%). A majority (53%) watch more than one hour of TV each day.

More than 7 out of 10 respondents (71%) said that they have cable television services for their TV. Among cable viewers, the most commonly viewed networks included: A&E (11% of viewers volunteered that they watch this network in a typical month); BET (7%); CNN (16%); Discovery (21%); ESPN-ESPN 2 (19%); Fox Sports Net (8%); Lifetime (13%); TBS (6%); the Learning Channel (8%); the History Channel (6%); TNN (6%); USA (7%), and HBO (7%).

(Note: Recognize that these percentages are based upon **unaided** recall of television networks. That means that it is possible that a greater percentage of people would have said that they watch each network, if we were to ask them directly about each network. The survey did not allow us enough time to ask about each network in a closed-ended fashion (e.g. *In a typical month, do you watch ESPN?*) – which would have given us a more complete picture. However, the current question was included to provide one angle of information about the cable viewing habits of UMC’s target.)

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### 3. Experiences With and Expectations of Churches

#### **One Target, Three Groups**

There are three groups within the UMC target that bear mentioning. Slightly more than one-third of respondents (37%) were marginally churched (MC) – representing perhaps 16 million adults in the country. These individuals attend a church in a typical month, but they told us that they are not committed to that congregation. Nearly 4 out of every 10 target adults (39%) have attended a church within the last two years, but not in the last month. These recently unchurched adults (RU) comprise perhaps 17 million adults nationwide. The third group would be considered long-time unchurched (LTU), having not been to a church in the last two years (but having attended a church worship service at least once in their life). These long-time unchurched individuals represent about one-quarter of the UMC target (24%, roughly 11 million adults).

Table 3.1 details the reactions of these three groups to the 18 attributes. Not surprisingly, the more "churched" a person is, the more likely he or she is to be attracted by the various descriptions. For instance, MC respondents rated 14 out of the 18 statements as more attractive than did RU or LTU adults. Also, the only attribute which was more attractive to LTU adults than to RU or MC respondents was a "church that does not require a specific set of religious beliefs."

Another interesting finding is the fact on 11 of the 18 attributes LTUs were far more likely than were the other two groups to suggest that the descriptions are not believable. LTU adult were least likely to trust what churches have to say about themselves, which may be due to LTU's lack of exposure to churches or having had bad experiences at churches in the past.

The two top-rated attributes were the same for all three groups: respondents liked a church that helps people in their community and a congregation that accepts everyone because God cares for everyone. Still, MC and RU adults found these statements comparatively more attractive than did LTUs.

MC adults also seek a church that deeply cares for and supports each other; a church that strengthens families; and a congregation that deals with real-life issues (81%).

Surprisingly, fewer than half of the LTU adults (47%) said that they would be attracted to a church that strengthens families by ministering to teens, children, and parents.

Among LTU respondents, we discovered that other than the two top-rated attributes, the following attributes were moderately attractive to a slim majority of MCs: a church that deals with the real-life issues that people face (58%); one that includes people from all financial walks of life (57%); a church that supports hospitals and children's homes (56%); a congregation that inspires the heart and stretches the mind (55%); one that

deeply cares for and supports each other (53%); a church that includes people from diverse cultures (52%); and one that encourages dialogue when opinions differ (52%). Notice that these attributes are all clustered in the 50%-range. One possible explanation is that LTUs do not have strong preferences in terms of the type of church they attend because they don't spend a lot of time thinking about such a choice. To the typical LTU, most of the attributes are moderately appealing; few, if any, of the descriptions would be a sure-fire way of attracting them to a church.

**Table 3.1: Reactions to the Attributes, By Church Status**

**Key:**

*MC* -- % of marginally churched

*RU* -- % recently unchurched

*LTU* -- % of long-time unchurched

<i>percent of target population</i> .....	<u>reactions to each of the attributes</u>					
	<u>--- % at all interested ---</u>			<u>--- % hard to picture---</u>		
	<u>MC</u>	<u>RU</u>	<u>LTU</u>	<u>MC</u>	<u>RU</u>	<u>LTU</u>
	37%	39%	24%	37%	39%	24%
<i>dimension: thoughtful</i>						
a. inspirational preaching .....	77%	65%	41%	3%	12%	18%
b. embraces a thoughtful faith .....	72	60	27	6	16	20
c. inspires heart/stretches mind .....	76	78	55	9	8	16
<i>dimension: caring, outreach-oriented</i>						
d. worldwide movement/making a difference .....	56	49	33	19	25	25
e. supports hospitals and children's homes .....	79	70	56	3	12	8
f. helps people in your community .....	89	79	60	5	1	10
<i>dimension: relational</i>						
g. deeply cares for and supports each other .....	82	76	53	6	6	19
h. people could make deep personal friendships .....	78	69	46	5	12	20
i. strengthens families (kids, teens, and parents).....	82	71	47	8	4	24
<i>dimension: accepting, inclusive</i>						
j. people from all financial walks of life .....	77	75	57	10	10	13
k. diverse cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds .....	70	74	52	13	13	13
l. accepts everyone because God cares for everyone.....	83	81	64	6	5	14
<i>dimension: open-minded</i>						
m. welcomes people with diverse opinions and beliefs.....	53	62	47	22	17	22
n. encourages dialogue when opinions differ .....	60	57	52	14	22	22
o. does not require a specific set of religious beliefs.....	30	33	40	30	33	30
<i>dimension: relevant</i>						
p. deals with real-life issues that people like you face .....	81	76	58	5	9	20
q. wants people to understand faith and put it into action .	79	64	44	1	17	13
r. affects lifestyle and decisions via commitment to Christ.....	69	53	43	8	12	17

Other than the two top-rated attributes, RU adults are particularly attracted to a church that inspires the head and stretches the mind; to a congregation where people deeply care for and support one another; and to a church that deals with the real-life issues that people face.

Let's briefly compare the preferences of the marginally churched to those who are recently unchurched. We discovered that MC adults were significantly more likely than were RU adults to gravitate toward a church that had the following attributes: features inspirational preaching; embraces a thoughtful faith; helps people in the community; fosters deep personal relationships between people; strengthens families; encourages people to understand their faith and put their faith into action; and influences people's lifestyles and decisions by promoting a personal commitment to Christ.

**Theographicsä**

In terms of theographics™ – which refer to the religious and faith-related variables that define Americans – we discovered that 2 out of every 5 respondents (40%) might be termed a “seeker.” Although they don't necessarily use the term seeker themselves, these people said that they consider themselves to be a person who is not yet committed to a particular faith or spiritual path, but they are exploring ways of finding spiritual meaning or connection. In comparison with national norms, not surprisingly, the UMC target is significantly more likely to be considered a seeker.

In contrast, the UMC target was less likely than average to call themselves "committed Christians." Nevertheless, more than half of the UMC target (53%) said that they consider themselves to be “a committed Christian.”

**Table 3.2: Theographicä Comparisons**

	<u>UMC target</u>	<u>US adults 25-54*</u>	<u>all US adults*</u>
<i>Does this describe you accurately...</i>			
• a spiritual seeker**	40%	27%	27%
• a committed Christian	53%	60%	60%

\*source: Barna Research 2000 national tracking study

\*\* These people said that they consider themselves to be a person who is not yet committed to a particular faith or spiritual path, but they are exploring ways of finding spiritual meaning or connection.

## Expectations of Churches

Not surprisingly given their lack of commitment to churches, very few respondents (12%) said that churches have exceeded their expectations thus far in life. About half of the UMC target (49%) said that churches have generally met their expectations, while 1 out of 3 target adults (33%) indicated that churches have not met their expectations.

We asked an open-ended question inquiring what the UMC target thinks the most important thing that a church has to offer to people like themselves. Table 3.2 lists the relevant percentages. We discovered that relationships were the most common reply among the UMC target – 29% of respondents mentioned something akin to 'relationships.'

Other common expectations of churches include teaching/instruction (18%); a place to grow spiritually (17%); and emotional support or emotional well-being (10%). In total, more than one-quarter of the UMC target (27%) suggested that they were not sure what a church could offer of value to them (17%); that they don't think a church can offer anything to them (7%); and that they don't like, need, or believe in churches.

**Table 3.3: What People Want from a Church**

**Key:**

*all – all respondents*

*MC – % of marginally churched*

*RU – % of recently unchurched*

*LTU – % of long-time unchurched*

	<u>all</u>	<u>MC</u>	<u>RU</u>	<u>LTU</u>
<i>percent of target population</i> .....	<b>100%</b> ...	<b>37%</b> .....	<b>39%</b> .....	<b>24%</b>
relationships .....	29%	33%	30%	22%
teaching/biblical instruction/a place to learn.....	18%	26%	16%	8%
a place to grow spiritually .....	17%	20%	20%	8%
emotional support/emotional well-being .....	10%	11%	11%	7%
self-improvement .....	3%	2%	4%	2%
activities, programs offered by churches .....	1%	1%	2%	1%
other.....	5%	6%	5%	3%
don't like, need or believe in churches.....	3%	1%	3%	5%
nothing .....	7%	1%	2%	24%
not sure.....	17%	10%	19%	27%

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As portrayed in Table 3.3, the expectations of marginally churching, recently unchurched and long-time unchurched adults are very different from one another. Here are a number of important revelations of the research data:

- Not surprisingly, ‘relationships’ was the most common type of reply among each of the three groups, although a minority of each group mentioned this response. Among LTUs, only 22% said that churches offer the opportunity to make relationships with others; among MC adults, 33% mentioned relational elements; among RU, it was 30%.
- The expectations of the MC and RU groups are strikingly similar. The one statistically significant difference is the fact that RU adults were less likely than were MC adults to say that churches should provide teaching, biblical instruction, and a place to learn.
- LTU adults were far more likely than average to say that churches have nothing to offer; that they are not sure what churches might offer them; or to say that they don’t like or believe in churches. In total, a majority of all LTU adults – 56% – expressed one of these three attitudes.

### **Experiences With Churches**

The two largest denominational groupings among the UMC target include Catholics (27%) and Baptists (25%). In all, 12% of the target affiliate with a Protestant mainline church; 45% attend (or used to attend) a Protestant non-mainline church (which includes Baptists).

We asked respondents to think about the church that they most recently visited and to identify the most important reasons why they visited that church. The reasons were as follows:

#### **reasons why the UMC target most recently went to church:**

- \* a family member took me (18%)
- \* knew someone there, a friend took me (17%)
- \* just wanted to go/the right time (9%)
- \* wanted to go for my child (7%)
- \* special service or event, such as a wedding or funeral (6%)
- \* grew up in the church/always attend there (5%)
- \* the speaker/sermon/teachings (4%)
- \* to learn about God/hear his word (4%)
- \* felt comfortable there (2%)
- \* close to home/liked the location (2%)
- \* holiday service (2%)
- \* heard an advertisement on the radio (1%)
- \* wanted to meet people, develop friendships (1%)
- \* other (18%)
- \* not sure (3%)

## 4. What the Audience Thinks About the United Methodist Church

### Awareness and Favorability

Many of these adults have a "soft" impression or virtually no impression of the Methodist Church, beyond name awareness. Note the fact that more than one-fifth of the UMC target (22%) says they have heard of the United Methodist Church, but are not able to provide any substantive perception of such churches.

**Table 4.1: Aided Awareness of Denominations**

<u>organization name</u>	<i>---favorable---</i>		<i>--unfavorable--</i>		<i>heard of, DK</i>	<i>never heard</i>	<u>DK</u>
	<u>VR</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>VR</u>			
Baptist Church .....	25%	41%	11%	7%	10%	3%	4%
Catholic Church .....	21	37	19	13	7	1	2
Lutheran Church .....	16	35	9	5	21	8	6
<b>United Methodist Church.....</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

*Favorability based on substantive awareness...*

<u>organization name</u>	<i>total awareness</i>	<i>total favorable*</i>	<i>very favorable*</i>
Catholic Church .....	97%	64%	23%
Baptist Church .....	93	78	29
Lutheran Church .....	86	78	23
<b>United Methodist Church.....</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>25</b>

**[CAMPAIGN OFFICE NOTE REGARDING ABOVE: Although we have low total awareness, we have high favorability among those who know about us. This is why we need a media campaign]**

\* based on those who have heard of, and have an opinion of, the denomination

Baptists and Catholics – easily the two largest groupings in the country – generate the highest overall awareness scores among these adults (97% and 93%, respectively). Total awareness for the Methodist Church is comparable to that of the Lutheran Church (85% and 86%, respectively). However, the Methodist Church generated a slightly higher favorability score (based on substantive awareness) than did the Lutheran Church (84% to 78%, respectively). Nevertheless, in very general terms, the image profile of these two groups (Methodists and Lutherans) is very similar to one another.

**UMC's Image – Or Lack Thereof**

To flesh out our understanding of the positioning of United Methodist churches, we asked the sample of target adults to describe the thoughts or images that come to mind about the United Methodist Church. We used an open-ended question in which respondents were encouraged to clarify their responses and to identify as many images or impressions as they can think of about United Methodist churches. Our interviewers recorded the answers to this open-ended question in verbatim form, which were subsequently categorized and keypunched so that we could more effectively analyze the results.

**Table 4.2: What Image Do People Hold of the UMC?**

This table shows the nets – or larger categories of responses – as well as some of the most common responses within those nets. Note that the table only includes responses that were made by at least four respondents.

<b>net: UMC people/knows someone who attends</b>	<b>16%</b>
– family/friend currently attends	8%
– family used to attend UM church	2%
– went to wedding at UMC church	2%
– very nice people	2%
– family oriented	1%
<b>net: the beliefs/rituals of UMC</b>	<b>8%</b>
– it is a religious organization	1%
– Christians that believe in Christ	1%
– they believe strongly in God	1%
<b>net: moral standards</b>	<b>6%</b>
– strict rules which govern lifestyle	2%
– tolerant/not strict	2%
<b>net: UMC compared to other denominations</b>	<b>5%</b>
– similar to Baptists	2%
<b>net: community outreach</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>net: preaching/style of UMC</b>	<b>3%</b>
– they have good church services	1%
– the preaching inspired me	1%
<b>net: activities promoted by UMC</b>	<b>2%</b>
=====	
<b>net: all churches are the same</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>net: no image/nothing comes to mind</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>net: not sure</b>	<b>10%</b>

We discovered that generally people have very limited impressions of the UMC, if any at all – a finding which has been true for each of the denominations whose image our firm has tested in the past. (Table 4.2 lists the percentages gleaned from this inquiry.) A majority of target respondents (54%) said that nothing came to mind about United Methodist churches. Another 3% said that all churches are essentially alike. Our experience suggests that when a large proportion of people tell us that they have no image of an organization or denomination, it may mean that many of those people who

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do, in fact, offer a substantive image of the denomination may not be firmly committed to that perspective.

Among those who offered a substantive "image," the most common types of responses were knowing someone who either currently or used to attend a United Methodist church (16%); identifying something about the beliefs or the traditions of the UMC (8%); mentioning the moral standards or leaning of the denomination (6%); comparing the UMC to other denominations (5%); identifying the emphasis on community outreach (4%); discussing the preaching featured at United Methodist churches (3%); and identifying the programs and/or activities offered by UMC congregations (2%).

Generally, people's images of the UMC are relatively superficial. For instance, among those who mentioned something about the beliefs of the UMC, the most common responses in that category were as follows: the UMC is a religious organization; it represents a group of Christians who believe in Christ; and it is a denomination that strongly believes in God.

Among those respondents who discussed the moral standards of the denomination, some felt it was a very conservative and strict organization (2%), while about the same number of people said that the denomination is tolerant and not strict (2%).

Only about 1% of respondents offered a description of the church that might be considered unfavorable – although there was no common complaint that linked those comments.

Generally, these findings support the notion that the United Methodist Church does not have any particular image problem. The UMC simply does not have any strong positioning or image among the target audience.

### **The Distinctiveness of the UMC**

In a second series of questions, we asked people if they thought that the UMC is different from other Christian churches. Among those who have heard of the United Methodist Church, fewer than one-fifth or respondents (18%) perceive that there are, in fact, real differences between Methodist churches and other Christian churches. Conversely, 19% maintain that the Methodist denomination is really no different than other Christian churches and 58% said they were not sure.

Among those 60 respondents who believe that the UMC is distinct from other Christian churches, we asked them to describe those differences in their own words. We discovered that the most commonly identified differences were as follows:

\* the theological beliefs and rituals of the denomination (n=20), including their interpretation of the Bible (n=3) and their baptism practice (n=3).

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\* the lifestyle and mentality of the UMC tradition (n=17) – which people described as more accepting, open-minded and less strict than other churches (n=10); although some respondents felt that the UMC is more conservative and more strict in terms of style of dress (n=5); just one person mentioned that UMC is different than other denominations because it accepts homosexuality

\* the preaching and style of the services (n=14) – in reference to which some respondents mentioned liturgy and the structure of the services (n=5)

### **Exposure to United Methodist Churches**

Those who have heard of the United Methodist denomination were asked if they recall seeing a commercial about the Methodist Church in the past month or so. About one-sixth (17%) said they had seen such an advertisement recently.

According to UMC's target, about 1 out of every 3 target adults (28%) has attended a United Methodist church at some point in their life (not including special events such as weddings or funerals). In other words, 72% of UMC's target has never attended a Methodist church (recall that 9% have never even heard of the Methodist denomination).

How likely is UMC's target to try a Methodist church in the future? Respondents were asked how likely they would be to attend a United Methodist church if they moved to a new town and were looking for a church. This is what UMC's target had to say....

- ✓ 25% would definitely not attend a United Methodist church
- ✓ 35% would probably not visit a United Methodist church, but might consider it
- ✓ 20% would probably visit a United Methodist church
- ✓ 16% said that the church denomination would really not make a difference

***Putting it all together:*** We would characterize these data as follows: about one-fifth of all members of the UMC target would be interested in a UMC church. These individuals were likely to be spiritual seekers\*, to be searching for meaning in life, to consider themselves to committed Christians, to be marginally churched, to say that churches have met their expectations in the past, and to say that they have attended a United Methodist church before.

About one-quarter of the members of the target audience told us that they are not at all interested in attending a United Methodist church. Many of these individuals have had bad experiences at churches, are simply not interested in what churches have to offer, or have attended UMC churches in the past and were unimpressed. For whatever reason, these individuals suggest that that they are opposed to the idea of attending a UMC congregation in the future.

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\* These people said that they consider themselves to be a person who is not yet committed to a particular faith or spiritual path, but they are exploring ways of finding spiritual meaning or connection.

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We would suggest that a slim majority of the UMC target – 51% – would not really pay much attention to the denomination of the church. Although many of these people told us that they would probably not attend a UMC congregation, their mentality is much more pragmatic than other members of the target audience. their approach is that they will attend a church that “works” for them – if they can find such a church and if they have time in their schedule.

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