

2023-2024 Communications Plan



COMMUNICATIONS

United Methodist Communications

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated 10/2023

Table of Contents



- Background
- Strategy
- Messaging
- Audiences
- Channels
 - Websites
 - Advertising
 - Public Relations
 - Social Media
 - E-Newsletters
 - Digital Marketing
- Content Plans by Audience
- Key Milestones
- Supporting Research



Strategy

Developing our Communication Plan

Research & Data



Strategy



Message

We will focus our messaging on promoting the brand, addressing disaffiliation, and legislative priorities.



Audience

We are identifying differences and nuances within our key audiences (Member/Leader/Seeker) that will allow us to reach precisely defined subsets.



Channel

We are using our channels to distribute content that is unique to the needs of every user.



Content Plan

We provide content based on a strategic plan to maximize efficacy of content, accuracy of reach and thoroughness of delivery.



Background

Since 1972, when the church's teaching about homosexuality and the parameters of its ministry to, with and by LGBTQI people became a part of The Book of Discipline, The United Methodist Church has struggled. In 2019, when the Special Called General Conference passed the Traditional Plan, the debate around this only intensified.

The UMC has seen an unprecedented number of disaffiliations with the use of Paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline starting in 2019, now equating to just over 20% of US churches (*this number will not be final until the end of 2023*).

Due to the global pandemic, GC 2020 has been delayed twice and is now scheduled for 4/23 – 5/3, 2024.

The church is grappling with tremendous change in the way it operates and ministers to its community due to continuing effects of the pandemic.

Communications Approach

Align: We will align our messaging across channels with defined audiences and schedules.

Clarify: We will clarify our UMC brand identity for the church.

Lead: We will lead with strategy rather than resources, enabling us to build strategic initiatives around our vision.

Listen: We will listen to our audiences and church leaders to develop appropriate resources and messages.

Embrace: We will embrace the digital world, leading the way with the latest technologies.

Balance: We will work in a balanced and coordinated team environment.

Collaborate: We will collaborate rather than work in self-isolated teams, and we will nurture a cooperative environment.

Leverage: We will leverage people's skills across our channels and media, maximizing our staff's talents.

Be proactive: We will anticipate communication needs to best serve the church.

Think globally: We will think globally in all we do, building an agency that supports the international footprint of our denomination.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



Produce messaging that encourages and inspires to engender hope among member and leaders of the church helping define the brand.

Create, utilize and promote stories from within the church that showcase how The UMC is fulling its mission all around the world in powerful and inclusive ways.

Aggregate, produce and share resources to equip leaders with the tools they need to help guide their congregations through this challenging time.

Ensure that the messaging and storytelling are available and relevant to the members of the global church. We will build communications in the major languages of the church that are contextual and relevant.

Messaging Focus Areas

Promoting The Brand



Across all channels and to all audiences, projecting and amplifying a vision of the church that inspires and unites by reflecting the identity of the church.

Addressing Disaffiliation



Provide clear support and guidance for those churches and leaders navigating disaffiliation.

Elevating Legislative Priorities



Global Regionalization: This proposes a **restructuring of the worldwide Church** based on equity and respect for each regional mission context. This is an important step toward decolonizing both polity and relationships.

Revised Social Principles: This legislation, offered by the General Board of Church & Society, is the work of more than 4,000 United Methodists from around the world, representing 8 years of service to this project. It **updates and improves our existing UM Social Principles**, with a more succinct, theologically grounded document that better reflects the global nature of The UMC.



Messaging Approach

- Stay focused on the positive
- Leverage existing common ground
- Demonstrate aspirational values
- Tailor messaging for audience and context
- Engage the diversity of the connection



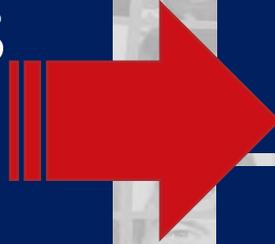
Audiences

TARGET AUDIENCES

Primary

Key groups to whom we send the most information

Leaders & Members



Subsets

Groups who may need specific and targeted information:

- Church members
- Delegates
- Bishops & Cabinets
- Clergy
- Caucus groups
- Annual conference staff
- Church boards and agencies
- Conference communicators
- Connectional Table
- Media
- Donors

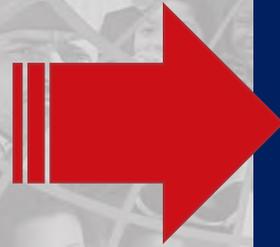
We are identifying differences and nuances within our key audiences that **will allow us** to reach precisely defined subsets.

Member Study

Key Research Findings

- Among those who have heard of #BeUMC, **61% say it is something they would participate in at their local church**, and that it is **empowering** and **unifying**.
- The **top 3 topics members** would like to hear about from The United Methodist Church are:
 1. Christian living/your daily journey
 2. What United Methodists believe
 3. What it means to be a United Methodist
- Awareness and usage of our products/services vary. The highest awareness percentages were seen for UMC.org and associated social media channels.
 - **64% of respondents** are aware of and use UMC.org regularly
 - **73% of survey respondents** are aware of and use the UMC social media channels regularly (Facebook, Instagram and YouTube)

TARGET AUDIENCES



Seekers

Individuals who are interested in spiritual fulfillment, but are not currently attending church

Subsets

Broken out for the purpose of targeting advertising

- Parents 25-49, Married/Unmarried, Kids <18
- Adults 25-35, Unmarried, No Kids
- Hispanic 18-34, Single & Married, Kids <18
- Millennials and Gen Z (could also fall into groups above)

21%

U.S. adults are Spiritual Seekers

- Spiritual Seekers are adults age 18-49 who are searching for meaning and purpose, consider themselves to be a socially conscious and spiritual person, but are not actively attending a church.
- Spiritual Seekers are more likely to be from suburban areas than rural/small towns, and more likely to reside in the South. They are more likely to be younger than the average population and unmarried. They are also more likely to be Latino.
- Spiritual Seekers say they are willing to consider attending a Christian church because they want to develop spiritually (34%), reconnect with their Christian roots (31%) and have a place for their children to learn good values (28%) all help guide our marketing and communication.
- They are more likely to attend a United Methodist Church if they are personally invited (70%). They continue to attend because they feel accepted (58%) and welcomed (52%).

Seeker

Key Research Findings

That Inform Seeker Advertising Messaging
(Barna Seeker Study 2019)

44%

are willing to visit a United Methodist Church in-person.

51%

are willing to visit a United Methodist Church online.

There are 36 million Seekers between the ages of 25 and 49.

Seeker

Key Research Findings

That Inform Seeker Advertising Messaging
(Barna Seeker Study 2019)

Seeker

Key Research Findings

Attitude Awareness & Usage (AAU) Study May 2023

- The United Methodist denomination has moderately strong “brand” awareness:
 - In the targeted geographies, Baptist and Catholic are the denominations with the strongest unaided awareness, followed by Methodist and Lutheran
 - On an aided basis, 3 denominations are recognized by over 90% of respondents: Catholic, Baptist and Jehovah’s Witnesses. United Methodist enjoys name recognition by 81%, placing it #8 of 24
- Across most measures, the differences between the targeted segments are generally small and subtle, suggesting that a core positioning and message strategy has the potential to motivate all targets.
- With that said, Millennials are more likely than the other targets to agree that they:
 - Experience emotional pain or frustration that they would like to resolve
 - Seek something better spiritually
 - Contribute to the common good of the community
 - Are a spiritual person
 - Are on a quest for spiritual truth
- Respondents identify with many reasons for not regularly attending church services – the most frequently selected were:
 - Members are too judgmental
 - Attending church services isn’t necessary for my faith or spirituality

Channels

- **Advertising**
- **Public Relations**
- **Social Media**
- **E-Newsletters**
- **Websites**
- **Digital Marketing**

Messages from multiple UMC sources

Technology

Delivery Channels

Right messages to right people



Content that is unique to the needs of every user

Audience	Website	Content
Member	UMC.org	Denominational website for members
Leader	ResourceUMC.org General Conference page	Denominational Website for leaders delivering content from across the connection
News	UMNews.org	UMNS stories and features
Seeker	UMC.org	Denominational website for those seeking spirituality and a community of faith

Websites

Advertising Campaigns (Member & Leader)

#BeUMC

During a time of chaos and confusion, the “People of God” campaign is meant to serve as a reminder of who we know we have been at our best—the **spirit-filled, resilient, justice-seeking, missional, connected, faithful, diverse and deeply rooted** people of God called The United Methodist Church.

The #BeUMC campaign reminds us of who we are at our best. As people of God called The United Methodist Church, we’re faithful followers of Jesus seeking to make the world a better place



[UMC.org/BeUMC](https://www.UMC.org/BeUMC)

[Resourceumc.org/BeUMC](https://www.Resourceumc.org/BeUMC)

#BEUMC MESSAGING



Disciple Making

First and foremost, we are dedicated to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in the tradition of John Wesley.

We live out this key theme through these **core values**: [Christ-centered](#), [Deeply rooted](#), [Disciple-making](#), [Faithful](#) and [Grounded in Scripture](#).

[LEARN MORE](#)



Belonging & Inclusion

All belong and will be loved in The UMC. All will be heard, respected and engaged. All will be free to develop their personal relationship with God and to serve fully in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

We live out this key theme through these **core values**: [Diverse](#), [Justice-seeking](#), [Resilient](#) and [Welcoming](#).

[LEARN MORE](#)



Influence, Connection, Impact

With more than 12 million members across the globe, we are a powerful connection, living and sharing the grace of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are committed to work for global health, education, creation care, child welfare, disaster recovery and countless other efforts.

We live out this key theme through these **core values**: [Missional](#), [Connected](#), [World-changing](#) and [Generous](#).

[LEARN MORE](#)



Experience of God through The UMC

We embrace a Church where we experience our triune God in personal and community relationships, transforming our own lives, the lives around us, and the entire world.

We live out this key theme through these **core values**: [Committed](#), [Grace-filled](#), [Justice-seeking](#), [Praying](#) and [Spirit-filled](#).

[LEARN MORE](#)

ResourceUMC.org/BeUMC

Social Media

8,595,214

REACH

of unique people reached

301,400

LIKES

Jan 2022 - Apr 2023

44,000

SHARES

Jan 2022 - Apr 2023

Web Sessions

7,150,000

Homepage visits

68,000

#BeUMC campaign page visits

YouTube

383,341

VIDEO VIEWS

of times the video was watched

#BeUMC

Awareness Campaign

Advertising

6,060,839

ADVERTISING IMPRESSIONS

of times ads are viewed

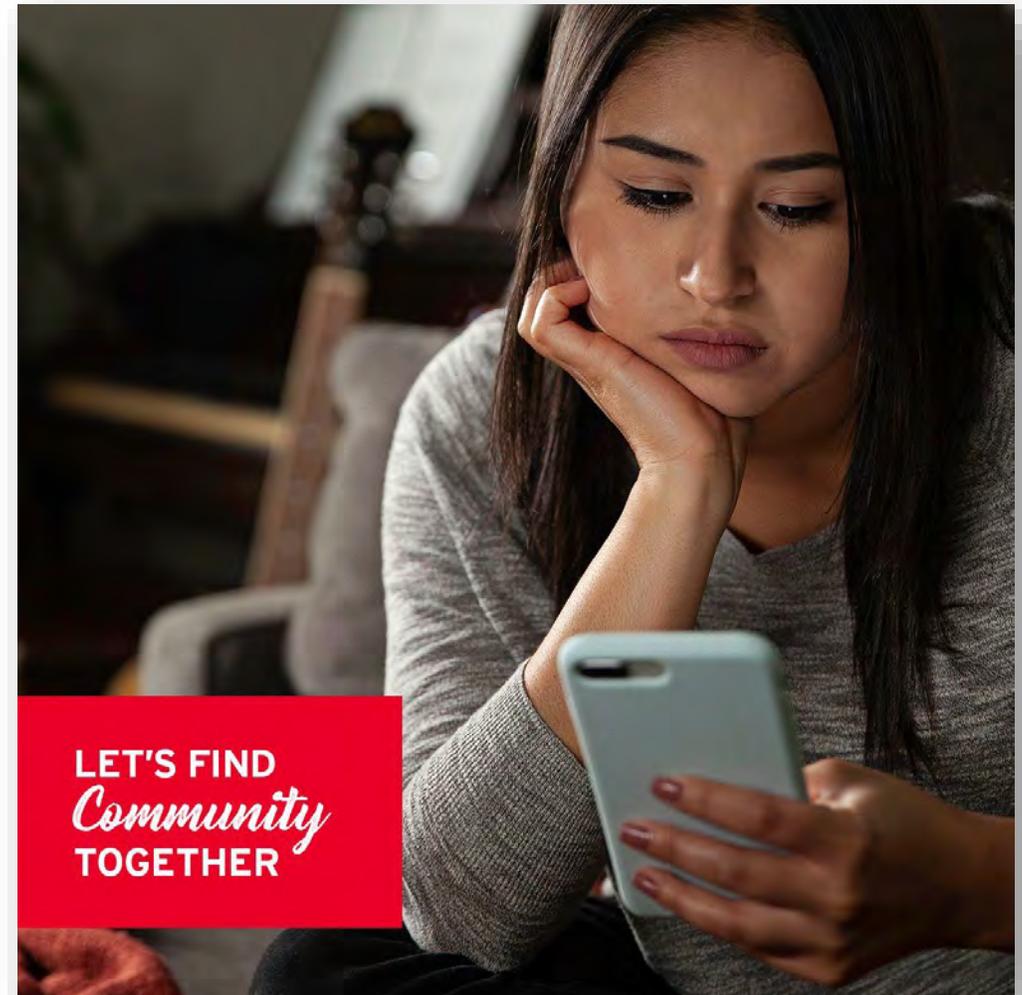
Advertising Campaigns (Seeker)

You're not the only one

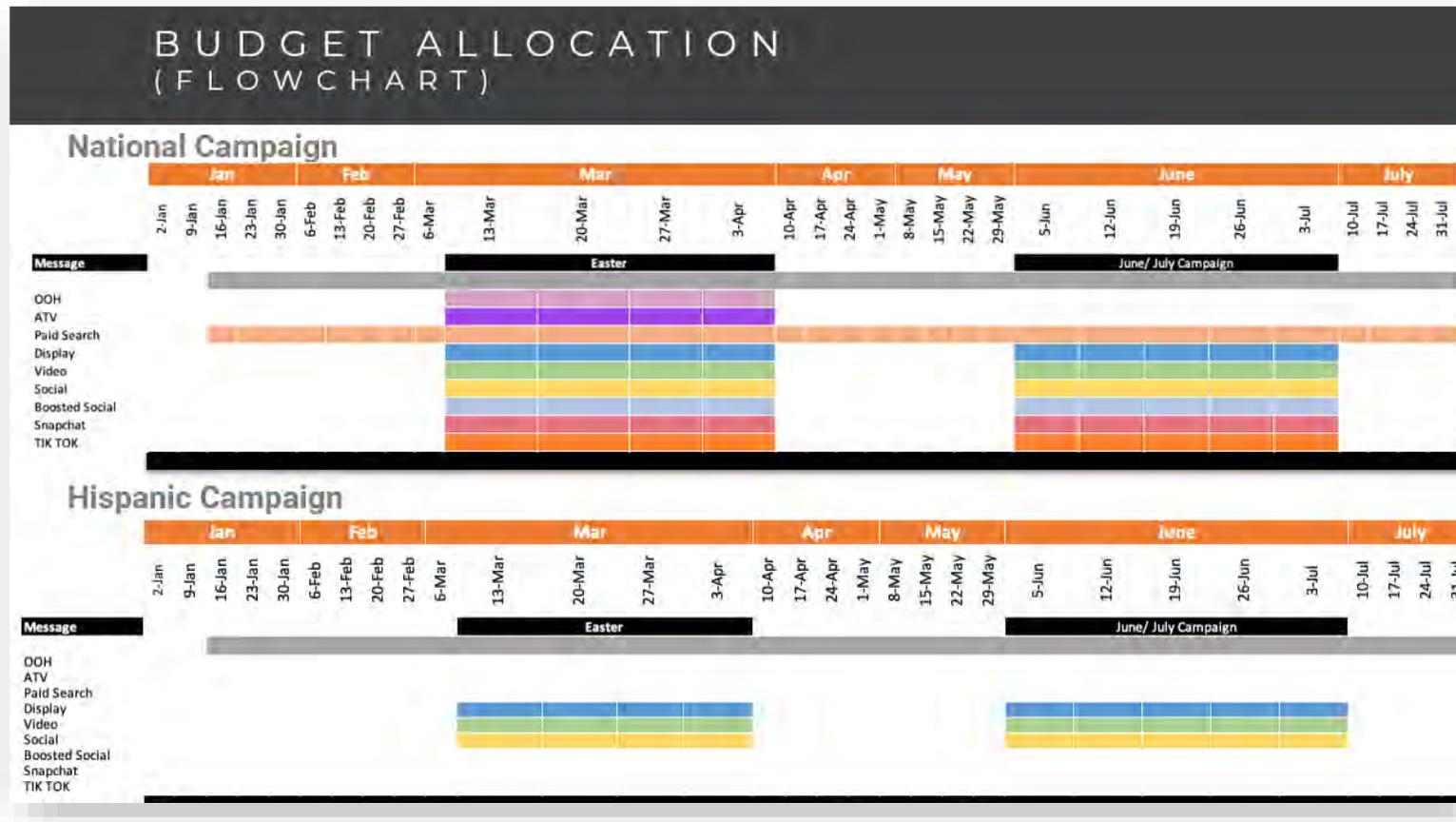
Responding to the felt need that those exploring the idea of church are often doing so out of a desire for connection. *You're not the only one* is an invitational campaign that doesn't attempt to show The United Methodist Church as perfect, but rather a place where all are welcome and we learn and grow together.

The landing page for the campaign provides a way for people to see that the church offers them a place to connect and belong.

[Campaign video](#)



Seeker Advertising



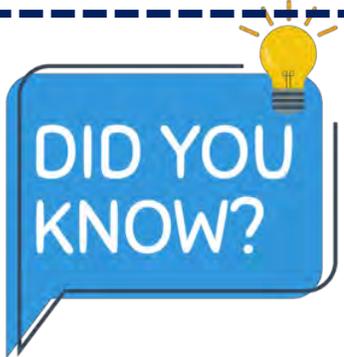
Seeker advertising is year-round

- Through paid media we have a year-round presence with paid search.
- Specific campaigns are held during key times of the year when individuals are more likely to visit a church (Easter, back to school, Christmas)

*OOH (Out of home - billboard, subways, etc.)

*ATV (digital television)

Advertising: New Campaign May 2024



DID YOU
KNOW?

*AAU Research suggests that “Seekers currently **practice their spirituality at an individual level and largely avoid group spiritual activities,**” and “Many agree with the **core tenets of Christian faith.**”*

Reviewing this, and other research, a new advertising campaign is in development.

Audience(s): Seeker, members

Timing: Following General Conference 2024, and continuing for 2+ years

Objectives:

- Build awareness of the UMC along with increasing visits to their landing page and Find-A-Church pages that helps the Seeker understand how the UMC is relevant to them.
- Bring excitement and hope to current UMC members.

PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVES

Raising awareness of the mission and ministries of The United Methodist Church to inform and create positive perceptions and goodwill.



- Provide **timely** and **accurate** information to our internal and external audiences
- Increase **name recognition** and promote **understanding of our beliefs** and goals to create a positive image of the church's mission and work and attract people to our churches
- Expand the **visibility of The United Methodist Church** in the international and national news media through proactive news media pitching and working to cultivate relationships with the media
- Create a more **active voice in the public dialogue** in order to make the values and theological positions of the denomination heard
- Work **collaboratively** with UMC entities and general agencies to further our mission and ministries
- Increase the UMC's **social media reach** and engagement among internal and external audiences and provide places for people to be in dialogue
- Equip church leaders to communicate more effectively through media relations and crisis **communication training** and consultation on crisis prevention and response strategies
- Develop and provide **message points** for communication campaigns and issues

Channel	The United Methodist Church	UMNews	United Methodist Communications	UMCGiving	Rethink Church	Resource UMC	Korean Church	IMU Latina	Recursos Metodistas Unidos	Generación in Between
Audience	Member	Leader & Member	Leader & Member	Leader & Member	Seeker	Leader	Korean Leaders & Members	Hispanic Leaders – Members	Hispanic Leaders & Members	Latinx Seekers & Members
Platform	Facebook Instagram YouTube	Facebook Twitter	Facebook Instagram Twitter	Facebook Twitter	Facebook Instagram Twitter YouTube	Facebook Twitter	Facebook	Facebook Instagram	Facebook	Facebook Instagram
Metrics	770K Likes 71K Followers (IG) 20.3K Subs (YT)	234K Likes 27.6K Followers (TW)	206K Likes 2.7K Followers (IG) 105K Followers (TW)	118K Likes 4.2K Followers (TW)	110K Likes 13.3K Followers (IG) 18.6K Followers (TW) 2.13K Subs (YT)	87K Likes 11.4K Followers (TW)	50K Likes	28K Likes 695 Followers (IG)	9.3K Likes	1.3K Likes 344 Followers (IG)

UMCom Managed Social Media Channels

Newsletter	UMNow	MyCom	UM News Daily Digest	UM News Friday Digest	The Source	Compass	Giving Notes	Duru Allimi	UMCOMtigo
Audience	Member	Leader	Leader & Member	Leader & Member	Leader	Seeker	Leader & Member	Korean Leader & Member	Hispanic Leader & Member
Subscriptions	128K	49K	61K	50K	16.0K	23.9K	6.2K	2.4K	970
Delivered (%)	97.0%	96.8%	96.0%	97.3%	97.7%	93.8%	97.3%	96.7%	96.0%
Opened (%)	37.2%	33.1%	39.1%	36.8%	49.8%	23.9%	38.8%	53.5%	40.8%
Click to Open (%)	9.4%	4.0%	11.5%	14.9%	10.2%	3.3%	8.0%	26.3%	17.6%

eNewsletters

Using Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the following will be executed:

- Landing pages on UMC.org will be “light” so that it loads quickly even on limited broadband speeds.
- Web content will be optimized with conversational keywords to improve recognition through voice search option.



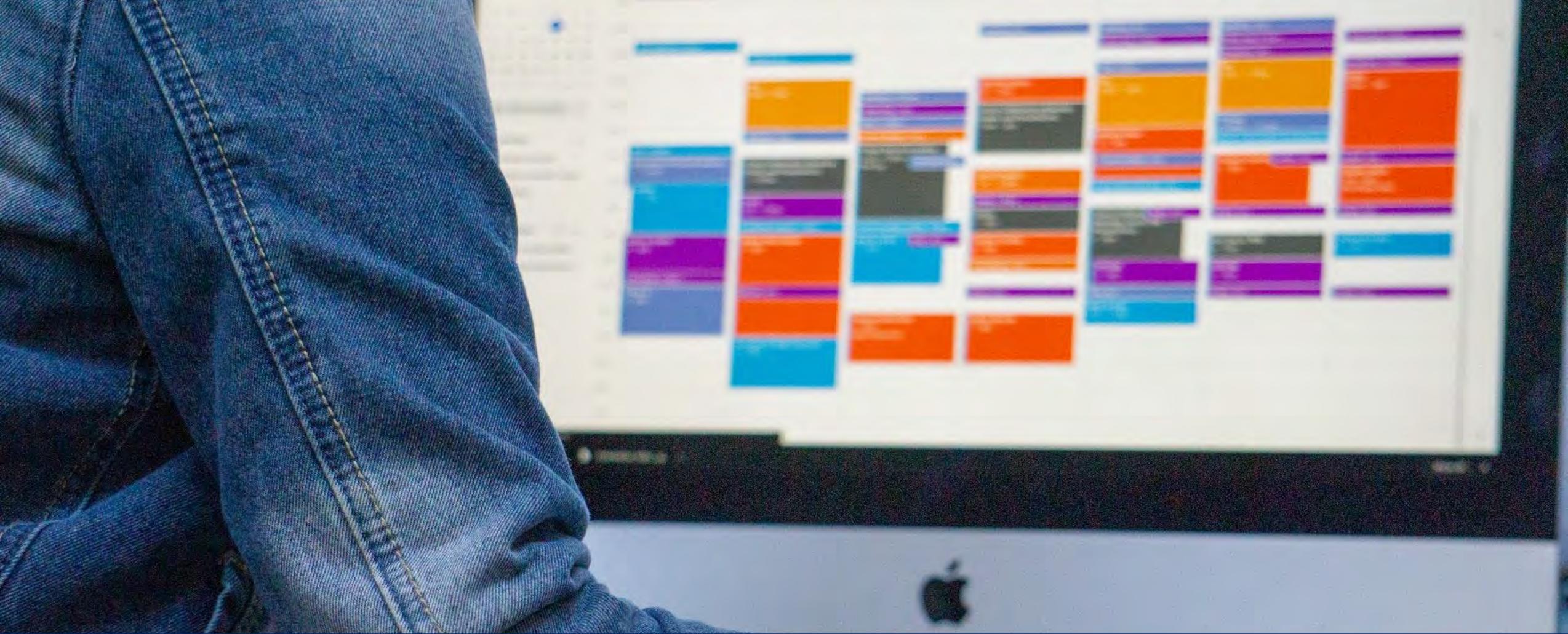
Search Engine Marketing

#BeUMC will be promoted through multiple channels: Grass Roots, Organic, and Paid Messaging through social media and other channels



- **Social networks** – paid (Facebook: post-/ad-/Messenger-specific campaigns; SnapChat): *Leaders and Members*
- **Google AdWords** – paid (Search & Display): *Leaders and Members*
- **Websites** (UMC.org: *Members*, UCom.org/ResourceUMC.org: *Leaders*, UMNEWS.org)
- **Annual conference websites, newspapers, e-newsletters:** *Leaders*
- **SMS campaigns:** *Leaders and Members*
- **Pop-ups on websites**, when possible: *Leaders and Members*





Content Plans

Content plans by audience



We will provide content based on a strategic messaging plan that will help us maximize efficacy of content, accuracy of reach and thoroughness of delivery.



Engage people with the story of God's work in the world through The UMC.

^
ENTIRE



2023 Content Themes

January	Jesus-seeking
February	Deeply Rooted
March	Resilient
April	Faithful
May	Spirit-filled
June	Justice-seeking
July	Grace filled
August	Welcoming
September	Grounded in Scripture
October	Disciple-making
November	Generous
December	Christ-Centered

[Google Sheet:](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1luLxpMQtJWWikrUkCqQp4wJUOQDwgJ8RK6Nw6cJAaIM/edit?usp=sharing)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1luLxpMQtJWWikrUkCqQp4wJUOQDwgJ8RK6Nw6cJAaIM/edit?usp=sharing>



1st Quarter



January: Jesus Seeking

Baptism
Grace (prevenient)
Christian Unity
Christmas
Epiphany



February: Deeply Rooted

UMC history
Diversity of our roots
Diverse leaders
Black history month



March: Resilient

Strength in difficulty
Opportunities to participate in renewal of self & others.
Lent
Women's history month
UMCOR Sunday

2nd Quarter



April: Faithful

Living as Easter people

Faith as lifestyle

Everyday mission

Holy Week

Easter

Native American
Ministries Sunday



May: Spirit-filled

Discover / develop gifts

Affinities & abilities as gifts

Places to serve in local church and beyond

Asian Pacific
American Heritage



June: Justice-seeking

Justice as spiritual practice

Methodist history of justice ministry

Peace w Justice Sunday

Juneteenth Women's history month

UMCOR Sunday

3rd Quarter



July: Grace-filled

Grace

Being gracious to others

Church as community

August:
Welcoming

Back to school / church

Offering genuine welcome

Sept: Grounded in Scripture

Bible study tools, tips

Worship & devotion

Hispanic Heritage Month

4th Quarter



October:
Disciple-making
Hispanic Heritage
Month
World
Communion
Sunday

November:
Generous
Native American
Heritage Month
World
Communion
Christ the King
Sunday

December:
Christ-centered
Advent
Christmas



2024 Content Themes

January	Committed
February	Deeply Rooted
March	Grace-filled
April	Connected
May	World-changing
June	Resilient
July	Missional
August	Welcoming
September	Praying
October	Diverse
November	Faithful
December	Christ-Centered

[Google Sheet:](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1luLxpMQtJWWikrUkCqQp4wJUOQDwgJ8RK6Nw6cJAaIM/edit?usp=sharing)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1luLxpMQtJWWikrUkCqQp4wJUOQDwgJ8RK6Nw6cJAaIM/edit?usp=sharing>

Multilingual Content Strategy

The UMC is a diverse Church with different perspectives, cultures, languages, experiences, and challenges. While we share a common Gospel, the ways we interpret and live it may be somewhat different. Therefore, we must adapt how we communicate. To more fully develop the global nature of our communications, we adhere to five principles that are key to the work:

- Inclusivity and Diversity
- Spiritual Nourishment
- Cultural Relevance
- Engagement and Participation
- Community Building



Multilingual Content Strategy

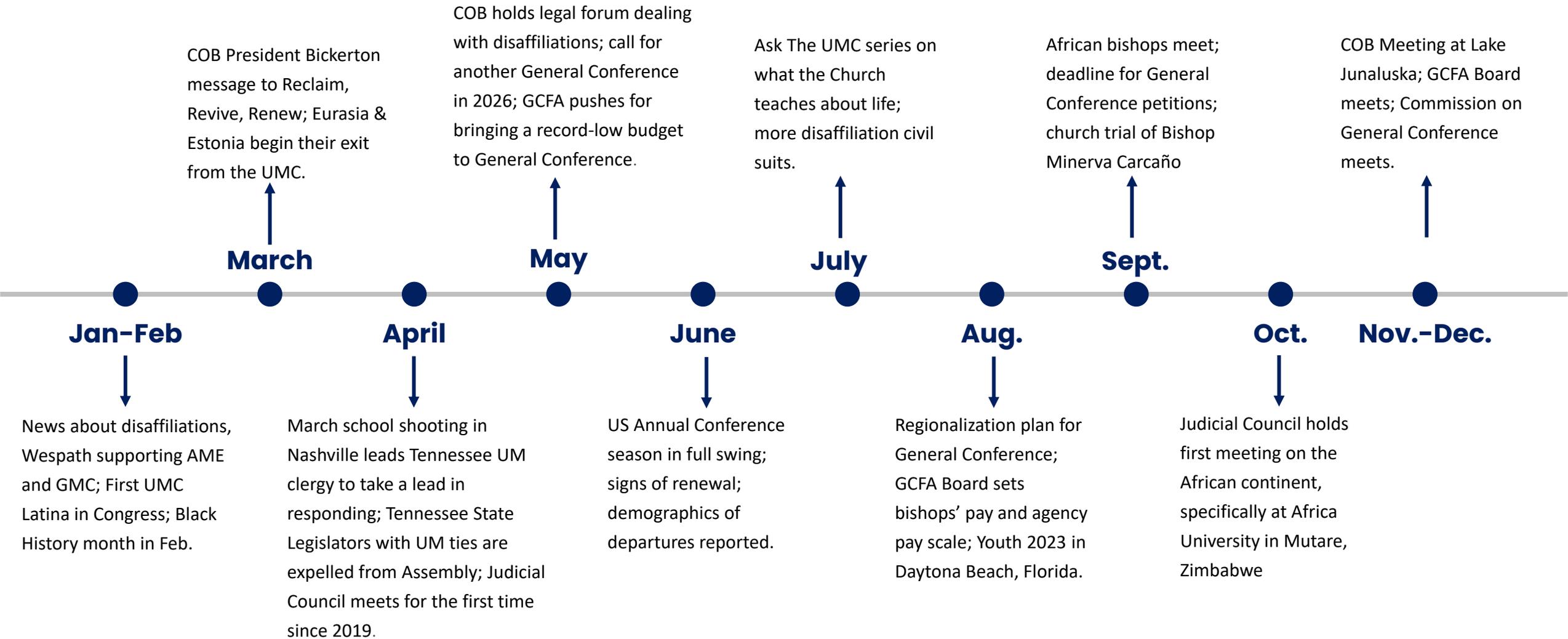
Throughout 2022, the Communication Team worked to increase the availability of content in languages other than English on UMC.org and ResourceUMC.org, and developed a process for updating pages regularly. The result was more than 50% increase in traffic to all non-English content. The teams continued to seek ways to initially generate content in languages other than English. For example, they partnered with pastors and leaders to write Holy Week devotions in Spanish -- which were then translated for their English-speaking audience.

Growth has continued in 2023 surpassing 2022 numbers after only nine months.

	2023 YTD Pageviews	2022 Pageviews	2021 Pageviews	2021-22 Increase
Spanish	1,284,171	782,958	500,876	56%
Francophone	42,814	42,187	20,843	102%
Korean	156,736	118,039	101,503	16%
Portuguese	27,924	20,324	12,928	57%
TOTAL	1,511,645	963,508	636,150	51%

51% increase in traffic to all non-English content

2023 Key United Methodist Milestones



2024 Key United Methodist Milestones

Africa Forum; The ADCA (which contains the petitions and reports requiring GC action) must be available to delegates by 1/22 in English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili.

General Conference preparation is underway.

General Conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina April 23 – May 3; US Annual Conference Season.

US Jurisdictional Conferences.

Central Conferences, no dates available at this time.

Council of Bishops meets.

Jan.

Feb.

March

April

May

June

July

Aug.

Sept.

Oct.

Nov.–Dec.

GCFA/Connectional Table finalize budget submitting to GC; **Pre-General Conference briefing** from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. U.S. Central time Feb. 29-March 1

General Conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina April 23 – May 3.

U.S. Annual Conference Season.

Central Conferences, no dates available at this time.

Central Conferences, no dates available at this time.

Additional Research

Research provides the grounding for all strategic message planning, allowing us to understand attitudes, behaviors, needs, motivation, media habits, audience segments and more, leading to the development of the most relevant content.

While this list is not exhaustive, some key studies by audience are listed here.



Leader:

- Ethnic Leader Panels
- Program Evaluation & Audience Review (PEAR) Study (update 2024)
- UM Communications Foundation (2024)

Member:

- Member Study
- UMC Youth Exploration Study

Seeker:

- Barna Seeker Study (2019)
- Seeker to Member Journey (2019)
- COMPASS Newsletter Evaluation (2020)
- Qualitative Spiritual Seeker Insights (2020)
- Attitude Awareness & Usage (AAU) Study May 2023
- The Advertising Creative Pretest Study (2023)
- Spiritual Seeker Study (2024)

*Full reports of completed studies are available upon request.

UMC Youth Exploration Study

- Strong preference for in-person engagement. They are exhausted from online only.
- Social Media is for entertainment; not for important issues. They do not want to discuss church or politics online.
- Youth perceive two different, separate roles for God and The UMC.
- These youth believe every world religion large or small has a kernel of truth in it. The implication of this belief is that no single church is considered the end all/be all.
- Attitudes around Truth are challenging. Youth have oodles of information at their fingertips and can find “truth” there. Trust and relationships take time. This is what makes people feel community. Help youth start conversations. Offer a space to have them. Ask them to create it. Do not create it for them. CO-CREATE!
- The results are posted here:
<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/youth-in-the-united-methodist-church>.

Key Research Findings

UMC 2023 Youth event in Daytona Beach - to highlight learning and practical ideas around youth inside and outside the UMC denomination.

Ethnic Leader Panels engage clergy and lay leaders in on-going conversations regarding their needs from and suggestions for United Methodist Communications. Panel engagements keep us in touch with leaders responsible for marketing and communications in their congregations.

The Black Leader Panel is in its 7th year. The Latino Leader Panel is in its 6th year and the Asian Leader Panel launched this year.

Our focus in 2023 is understanding cross-racial/cross-cultural appointments and pastoring in a multigenerational congregation. Focus group learning across all three panels indicate these areas are worthy of further exploration; building into our strategy.

1. Build a Strong Foundation
2. Intentionality & Preparation
3. Build Relationships. Build Trust.
4. Promote & Use Existing Resources
5. The Role of UMCom

Ethnic Leader Panels

Key Research Findings

The **Disaffiliation and Spirituality Study** guides content and placement strategies to make The UMC more relevant. For example, this study illuminates activities participants find most spiritually fulfilling. It also identifies activities and programs of interest offered by a religious organization. This study revealed similar profiles in terms of overall political preference and personal theology.

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	No Answer/No Preference
Overall Political Preference	34%	34%	26%	6%
Personal Theology	36%	30%	31%	3%

Top 5 things like most about being a United Methodist:

- Emphasis on God's grace
- Encourages a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- Accepts people from all walks of life, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or economic condition
- Theology shaped by scripture, with tradition, experience and reason
- Is active in service to its community

Disaffiliation and Spirituality Study

Key Research Findings

For more information

Jennifer Rodia

Chief Communications Officer

jrodia@umcom.org



COMMUNICATIONS

United Methodist Communications

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH