

**COMMUNICATIONS**  
United Methodist Communications

**75**  
YEARS

1940 • 2015

**COMMUNICATING FAITH  
FOR 75 YEARS**



## UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS CELEBRATES 75 YEARS



### AGENCY LOGO

United Methodist Communications recently released a new toolkit to help unify branding among local churches, annual conferences, general agencies and other denominational entities.

COURTESY UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS



### TRAFCO

Taking advantage of technological advances that could enhance communication, the 1948 General Conference formed the Radio and Film Commission. It later became the Television, Radio and Film Commission.

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### 1940 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

In 1940, Methodist bishops formed the Commission on Public Information to relate to news media outlets, ensuring that the church's news would be shared with the public.

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In 2015, United Methodist Communications celebrates its 75th year of telling the church's story.

The denomination's communication agency has come a long way since 1940 when Methodists were first introduced to a Commission on Public Information at the dawn of a communications revolution.

At the time, many – but not all – families in the United States had telephones. Newspapers were the primary carriers of information. Radio

news was just taking off, and televisions were mostly out of reach. But the bishops of the newly unified Methodist Church saw the importance of mass communication.

They called for “well-planned and well-executed

publicity,” saying that people were “Methodistically informed” only in the most meager way.

On Oct. 1, 1940, the Rev. Ralph Stoody carved a milestone when he opened the first communications office in New York with a \$25,000 budget and a focus on getting feature stories and personalities into the news. Satellite offices followed in Chicago and Nashville.

The efforts of Stoody and his colleagues met with success. Movie-goers saw newsreels in theaters, radio listeners heard Methodist-produced programs and series and readers saw stories placed in major magazines.

The productive 1940s set a precedent for cultural relevance influenced by trailblazers and visionaries. As the decades progressed, the agency evolved through many name and structural changes, continually seizing upon innovation and garnering a long list of “firsts.”

Undoubtedly, more “firsts” are to come. As technology races at breakneck speed, it changes our capacity to communicate. We can't wait to see what comes next.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES STRENGTHEN INNOVATIVE AGENCY

The clatter of manual typewriters and the metallic ringing of rotary telephones that filled the early offices of what is today United Methodist Communications soon gave way to ever-evolving communication tools, empowering innovative ministry for 75 years.

In the 1940s, the Methodist Information staff carefully typed and mailed news stories and press releases, waiting days for responses from reporters. The pace increased in the 1970s as the staff composed stories on electric typewriters, photocopied them for mailing and faxed them to media outlets.

Capabilities changed drastically with the arrival of computer-based

technology in the 1980s. Retiree Zona Watkins worked with the agency's first computer. “I worked on different projects: letters for large mailings, newsletters, forms...it was really something to be able to easily make changes to documents,” she reminisced. “No more Wite-Out!”

External communication thrived with the launch of the first denominational website in 1995. Sherri Thiel, now the agency's chief operating officer, was a member of the team that created UMC.org. “We saw it as a different avenue for people to dialog with the church as well as a means to deliver information,” she said.

With the ability to connect directly to the church's growing audience, the

agency developed the Find-A-Church online directory, web-based program publications and an ever-increasing range of tools and materials for local church use.

Today's offerings include online training, social media tools, website hosting, technology-centered resources, multi-media marketing campaigns, UMTV video features and ICT4D (Information & Communications Technology for Development) initiatives.

As technology continues to improve and shift, United Methodist Communications will embrace the opportunities it affords, using it to carry the church's message of hope into the future.



### REPORTING IN THE 1950s

Among reporters covering the 1952 General Conference are (left-right) Bob Bell, Jr. of Nashville Banner, Bill Bechtel of Milwaukee Journal, Willmar Thorkelson of Minneapolis Star.

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### FIRST WEBSITE

The first version of UMC.org, the denominational website for The United Methodist Church, was created in 1995.

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### EBOLA TEXT MESSAGES

A historic text message regarding the Ebola outbreak is sent via mobile technology from United Methodist Communications in Nashville, Tennessee on behalf of Bishop John G. Innis of Liberia.

KATHLEEN BARRY/UMCOM



## EXPERIENCING A GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION



**CÔTE D'IVOIRE RADIO STATION**  
Lydie Acquah, director of 101.6 FM in Abidjan, sees the Voice of Hope radio station as a means of combating poverty and empowering people in Côte d'Ivoire. The United Methodist Church launched the station in December 2010.

TIM TANTON/UMNS



**COMMUNICATION PLANNING**  
Participants in the Philippines develop communication plans during April 2015 training led by United Methodist Communications staff.

JENNIFER RODIA/UMCOM

Over the decades, United Methodist Communications has shared many central conference stories and worked with churches in Africa, Europe and the Philippines in developing print and video resources to promote denominational ministries and to encourage financial support following disasters. The agency's presence at the denomination's global General Conference has given a voice to many United Methodists who have felt voiceless.

Working in genuine partnership with the central conferences got a significant boost 11 years ago. The 2004 General Conference moved to strengthen communication through the Central Conference Communication Initiative, a collaborative effort between United Methodist Communications and central conference leaders in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.

United Methodist Communications initiated strategies to move the denomination toward equalizing communication abilities, capabilities and possibilities throughout the connection. Pioneering work included communication audits, equipment purchases and training academies. Partners in the United States shared their energies and budgets to enable the establishment of communication centers.

The initiative, says Phileas Jusu, conference communicator in Sierra Leone, "brought United Methodist work in Africa to the limelight. With training and support, African communicators have been empowered to tell Africa's story to the world."

In addition, United Methodist Communications, in partnership with central conference leaders, developed programs sensitive to local needs and available technology. The agency:

- Trained people to use communications – radio, mobile and emerging technology, television, websites, computers, newsletters, photography and writing;
- Established or augmented existing partnerships between central conferences and U.S. annual conferences;
- Collaborated with bishops, communicators and others to determine the types of communications needed; and
- Shared life-transforming stories that arose from the partnerships.

The agency established a team for Information and Communications Technology for Development that keeps abreast of technology-based programs for social change through education, medicine and other disciplines. In 2014, United Methodist Communications brought world experts and church leaders together for the first Game Changers Summit on the use of technology.

Today, communications skills and tools are enabling United Methodists around the world to improve their communities and be in ministry in relevant ways.

## TELLING THE STORY OF GENERAL CONFERENCE

A General Conference in real time with participation in countries around the world could not have been imagined in 1939 when the building blocks were laid for United Methodist Communications.

United Methodist Communications in its early years carved a significant role as a liaison between the church and the secular press. That role, helping to explain Methodism and the actions and missions of the church, most importantly through the General Conferences, continues today.

A big first in 1952 – extensive radio and television coverage of that year's General Conference – was just a peek through the door to the future that would come rushing in.

As the fledgling digital communications industry of the '80s grew into the full-speed-ahead, computer-driven technology of the '90s, the communications agency made use of emerging technology to help the church tell its story.

Using satellites, United Methodist Communications sent cable TV systems two-hour summaries of the 1980 General Conference. In 1984, a pilot computer network service was used to transmit daily news stories, commentary and bulletins. In 1988, "Catch the Spirit" crews delivered 15-minute news summaries as well as 30-minute weekly broadcasts via the Cokesbury network.

By the 2000 General Conference, the agency produced web pages that reported the actions and told the stories of the gathering. Live streaming began in 2004 and by 2008 was significantly enhanced.



**1952 UNITED METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
During the 1952 General Conference, more than 480 radio stations featured the commentary of Rev. Walter Van Kirk, an already well-known radio personality. Various other General Conference attendees were featured on television programs in Los Angeles and San Francisco, home city to the conference.

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**1988 GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
Long-time production team member Dixie Parman films conference proceedings.

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**2008 UNITED METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher delivers the Episcopal Address during the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

MIKE DUBOSE/UMNS

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## IGNITING A WELCOMING SPIRIT



**TIMES SQUARE BILLBOARD**  
The church began advertising in Times Square in New York City after a policy banning faith-based ads was reversed in 2003.

JAMES STEPHENS/UMNS PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



**RETHINK LAUNCH**  
Rethink Church was launched in 2009 in New York City near Times Square, with volunteers doing random acts of kindness.

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At the turn of the century, United Methodist Communications saw the need to break through the ever-expanding digital noise and reach out with a message of hope, faith and love.

The answer was a robust advertising effort on behalf of 36,000 United Methodist congregations across the United States. The Igniting Ministry campaign launched in 2001 with a \$22 million budget and a memorable promise: "Our hearts, our minds, and our doors are always open. The people of The United Methodist Church."

Focused on 25-54-year-olds, the campaign was a new kind of multi-media evangelism, comprised of television, print, digital and outdoor advertising, as well as resources for local churches. More than 30 regional welcoming training sessions were held across the country.

"No other denomination was doing this kind of advertising, and the key was bringing the churches along to welcome visitors across their threshold," said former staff member Jackie Vaughan.

The national television campaign began on Sept. 5, 2001. Six days later, the country was reeling from the now-infamous terrorist attacks.

"The United Methodist Church was

one of the first advertisers back on television after the attacks," said the Rev. Steve Horswill-Johnston, former director. However, the advertising focus changed to convey a message of hope and support: "The people of The United Methodist Church are praying with you."

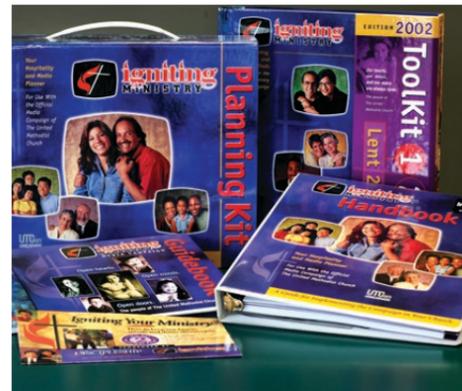
After four years, first-time attendance at 160 test churches had grown by 19 percent, and overall attendance in those congregations had increased by 9 percent. By 2007, 54 percent of survey respondents expressed a willingness to visit a local United Methodist church.

After eight years, United

Methodist Communications saw a need to evolve. A new campaign offered an invitation to "Rethink Church" to a younger audience yearning to make a difference in the world. Outreach events incorporating volunteer activities became part of the strategy.

Reaching a tech-savvy audience whose attention has increasingly shifted online also meant adding mobile, social and digital channels.

"You are doing something right," said one mom. "My 16-year old excitedly reported seeing one of your ads on YouTube. You are getting through."



**IGNITING MINISTRY**  
Comprehensive Igniting Ministry tools were available for congregations as part of the campaign.

KATHLEEN BARRY/UMCOM

## A NEW LEADER FOR A NEW FUTURE

Dan Krause was not a part of the groundbreaking cast who charted the course of United Methodist Communications' rich and storied history, but he plays a starring role in its future.

The General Commission on Communication tapped the seminary-educated, former corporate marketing VP to lead the denomination's global communication agency beginning in June. He brings with him a combination of business savvy, a heart for meaningful work and experience in teaching a team about the spirit of service.

In the United Methodist Communications' chief executive post, Krause sees a compelling opportunity to tell the story of the positive impact United Methodists are making in the world, as well as to be a unifying voice for The United Methodist Church. So what are his goals for the agency?

"I'd like for us to be known as a collaborator across the denomination, a party that brings our agencies and churches together and creates dialogue in respectful ways. I'd like us to be known for providing resources that are engaging and inspiring and that lift up all the great work of our denomination. And I'd like for us to be known as communication leaders, sharing the message of God's work in the world so that lives are transformed through our ministries and participation in our faith communities," he says.

"I'd like to see United Methodist Communications be a global voice for the denomination. And I'd like to form stronger relationships with local churches around the world who are looking at how to communicate in their local communities, whether that's creating strategic marketing plans or using new and innovative communication tools," Krause continues.



**DAN KRAUSE**

COURTESY UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS

He says United Methodist Communications will continue to embrace emerging technologies and then innovate beyond that.

"We're in an era where people are mobile and social, so our resources need to be available in formats that are available where people are," he says. "But we serve very different demographics in our churches and we have to balance that."



**TECHNOLOGY AT GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
Technology was evident everywhere at the 2012 United Methodist General Conference in Tampa, Fla. A visitor uses her iPad to catch the action on the floor.

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BARRY, UMNS



## COMMUNICATING FAITH FOR 75 YEARS

### IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK ...

United Methodist Communications  
hosts Hollywood and music elite

**H**eadquartered in the heart of Music City USA, United Methodist Communications' state-of-the-art studios have hosted dozens of musicians, television actors and movie stars for church-related productions and for secular projects through a multi-media services company known as Kingswood Productions.

In 1956, the Methodist Church's communications agency in Nashville, Tennessee, shared its office and studio space with major record label RCA. On Jan. 10, a 21-year-old named Elvis Presley recorded five songs, including "Heartbreak Hotel," in the studio.

Recording artists Loretta Lynn and Tennessee Ernie Ford came to the studios in the early 1980s to shoot a commercial for Martha White biscuits.

Author Alex Haley of Roots fame hosted scenes for the United Methodist bicentennial film in 1983.

M\*A\*S\*H\* star Mike Farrell filmed a scene for a documentary on the Salvadoran civil war. It required the crew to construct a large rock from Styrofoam to match the scenery of on-location shots in El Salvador.

In the 1980s, the Kingswood crew worked with up-and-coming



**MIKE FARRELL**

COURTESY HARRY LEAKE

recording artists such as Amy Grant, Alabama and Reba McEntire on video projects. Today, stars such as Restless Heart, Florida Georgia Line and Darius Rucker continue to look to the crew to shoot their music videos.

Revenue from these projects supports church ministry.