

2011
RETHINKCHURCHTM
RESEARCH

December 2011



Background

United Methodist Communications launched “Igniting Ministry” in 2001 to increase awareness and recognition of The United Methodist Church’s basic beliefs, to promote willingness to visit a United Methodist church, and to renew a sense of commitment among United Methodists. Igniting Ministry’s overall theme “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.” grew out of research showing that The United Methodist Church is appreciated for its: caring heart for those in need; open-mindedness that requires no attachment to a mandatory creed; and open doors to people with diverse opinions, cultural traditions, and ethnic backgrounds and beliefs. The Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. national cable advertising became the first spots approved to air nationally after September 11, 2001 suspension of advertising. The message was simple: “Fear is not the only force at work in the world today. The people of the United Methodist Church are praying with you.” The United Methodist Church was able to deliver many messages of hope through Igniting Ministry and extend an invitation to the Christian community. The Igniting Ministry campaign reached millions of people from 2001-2008. Grants for local media advertising were made available to churches, and thousands of church leaders were trained in welcoming and hospitality skills. The efforts of Igniting Ministry set the stage for Rethink Church, as United Methodist Communications expanded efforts to reach the thousands of young people who were rejecting church at a higher rate than ever before. The new communication landscape called for new methods of reaching seekers age 18-34. Rethink Church highlights the many opportunities available within United Methodist churches to engage with the world – from literacy programs to feeding the poor. Rethink Church advertisements have appeared in traditional and new media, and direct viewers to the website www.rethinkchurch.org, where visitors may interact, learn more about the church, and search for involvement opportunities.

2011 Rethink Church Research

The Rethink Church initiatives begun in 2008 have been successful in improving attitudes towards The United Methodist Church and engaging young adults to participate in activities that live out faith and social consciousness. The United Methodist Church and the Rethink Church reputation is growing and is most effective when combined with community events that match young adult interests.

Young Adult Seeker Study

- The number of young adult seekers is growing significantly. Two out of every five young adults is a seeker and the number has grown from 33% in 2009 to 42% in 2011.
- 95% of seekers are looking for ways to make meaningful contributions with their lives, with more than a third active in volunteer activities.
- Twenty-five percent (25%) of those aware of The United Methodist Church have a favorable impression of UMC, and only 12% have an unfavorable opinion. Those with no opinion also offer opportunity for engagement if efforts model their interests.

Local Market Study

- Linking local activities to Rethink Church doubled favorable impressions of United Methodists in the test regions.
- Attitudes towards the churches and likelihood to visit was enhanced by the Rethink Church association.

TWO RESEARCH STUDIES TO GAIN INSIGHT AND MEASURE IMPACT

Beginning in 2000, United Methodist Communications has conducted regular research studies with unchurched and nominally churched young adults to gain insight into attitudes towards churches, spiritual needs, perceptions and expectations of churches.

In 2011, United Methodist Communications commissioned two studies from The Barna Group and Corporate Research to measure recognition of The United Methodist Church and Rethink Church activities on both a national and market level.

- **Young Adult Seeker Update** – National online study with 812 participants
- **Local Market Studies** – Regional online study with 315 participants in Missouri and Western North Carolina.

The Barna Group is a leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture. Barna regularly reports on major trends and findings that impact the Christian community and the role of faith in America.

YOUNG ADULT SEEKER UPDATE RESEARCH STUDY

There are major societal, economic and cultural changes that are impacting young adults of today. While many were churched during their teens, they tend to migrate away from church during the years of significant change as they launch their lives – leaving home, finishing school, establishing themselves in a job or career, getting married or entering into long-term relationships and having children. While past generations have re-entered the church when faced with major life experiences like marriage and children, the current generation is not re-establishing themselves with church as actively as their parents did.

Young adults are also less likely to have become completely independent or completed these important life changes by the time they are age 30. Young adults are leaving home later, marrying later, struggling with careers because of recessionary pressures, having children later and some 50% are choosing to have children out of wedlock.

This Young Adult research sought to identify interests that engage young adults in relationships with the church. This information, along with reporting on Rethink Church internal adoption, is important in charting the future of communications for the United Methodist Church. Recent internal studies among United Methodist clergy and leaders found that the Rethink Church efforts were well known by all groups and strongly supported by 66% clergy and 54% of leaders. Also, 39% of clergy reported their church had participated in or sponsored Rethink Church activities.

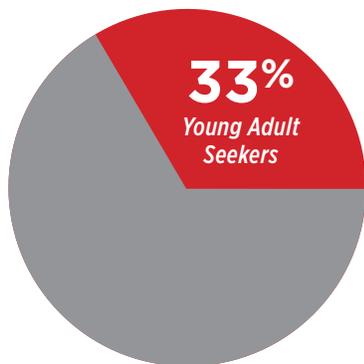
A powerpoint of the significant findings of the Barna Group Young Adults report can be found at www.umcom.org/rethinkchurch. A copy of the Four Areas of Focus report detailing internal adoption of Rethink can be found at www.umcom.org/rethinkchurch.

Nine Things to Know About Young Adults and Social Causes

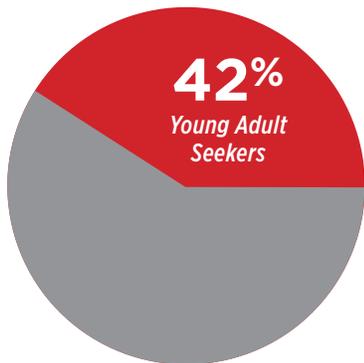
1. The Number of Seekers is Growing Significantly and Most Seek Meaning and Purpose for their Lives.

In 2009, the percentage of young adult seekers was measured at 33%, and the percentage has grown to 42% in this latest survey. The original issues that caused young adults to become less involved in any church are still present in many denominations and individual churches.

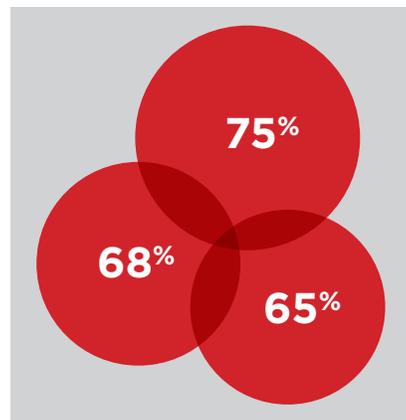
While seekers may not be active in church, 60% see themselves as spiritual. Seventy-five percent (75%) are also interested in finding purpose and meaning for their life, with an almost unanimous 95% wanting to make a difference with their lives.



2009

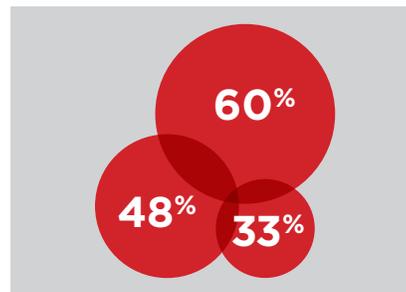


2011



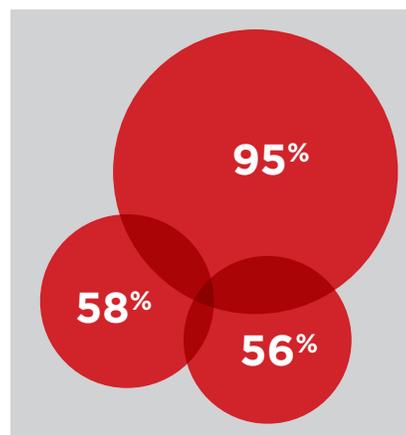
Seeking

- 75% *You are searching for meaning and purpose*
- 68% *Something feels missing from your life*
- 65% *You have emotional pain or frustration that you'd like to resolve*



Spirituality

- 60% *You are a spiritual person*
- 48% *You are seeking something better spiritually in life*
- 33% *You are on a quest for spiritual truth*



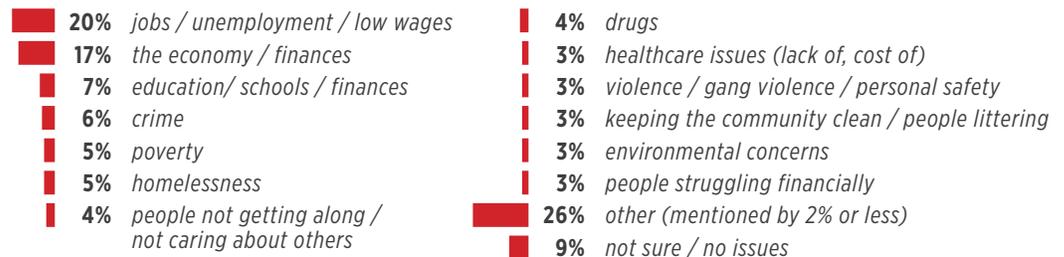
Social Consciousness

- 95% *You want to make a difference with your life*
- 58% *You have a passion for social justice*
- 56% *You contribute to the common good of your community*

2. The Causes and Issues that Interest Seekers Reflect the Times.

As expected, the issues and causes that generate interest from seekers are varied but reflect the economic and disaster needs that have plagued many in the past four recessionary years. Local causes that motivate interest are green initiatives, food banks, disaster relief, community clean-up, mentoring/coaching children, assisting with schools and helping the homeless. Internationally, hunger and poverty issues spur interest among young adult seekers.

What do you feel is the most pressing issue facing your community?

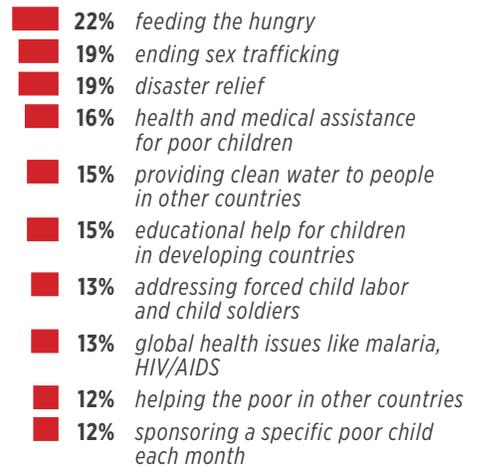


In the next few months, how much would the following causes motivate you to become personally engaged? (% definitely willing to become engaged)

LOCAL

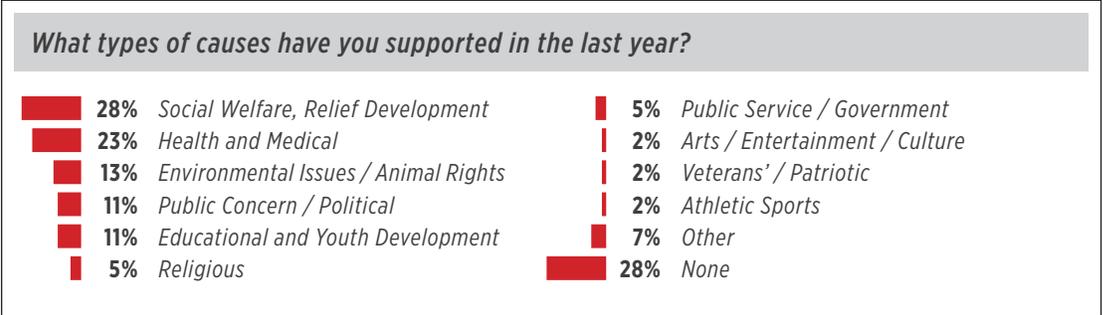


GLOBAL



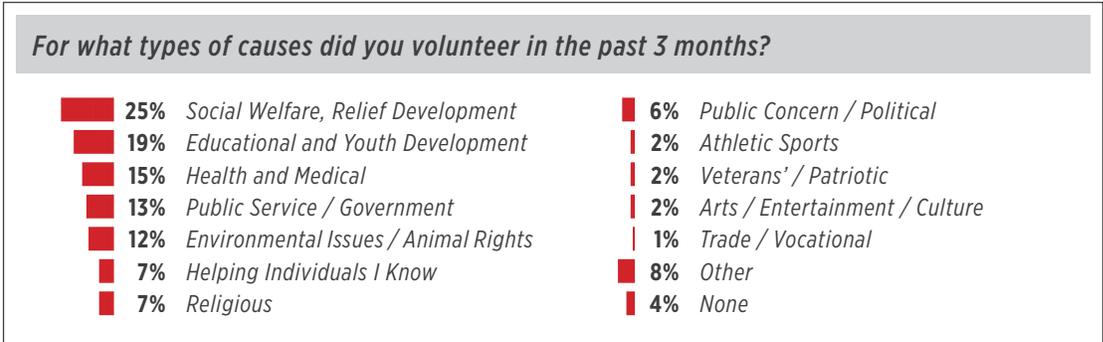
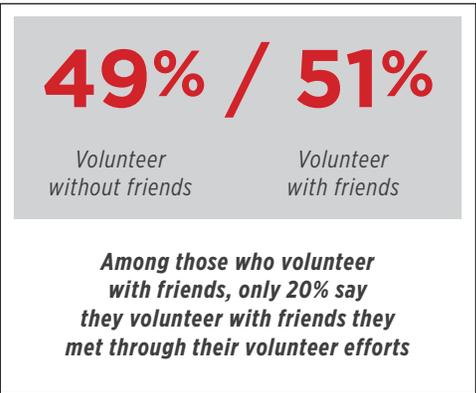
3. More than one in three seekers have volunteered their time.

The importance of hands-on participation for young adults is reflected in equal levels of participation and donor activity. Some 36% of young adults volunteered their time and 37% donated money to a non-profit. Their passion is reflected in the number (32%) who seek to persuade others to support a cause.



4. Volunteering is peer motivated and must fit their busy schedule.

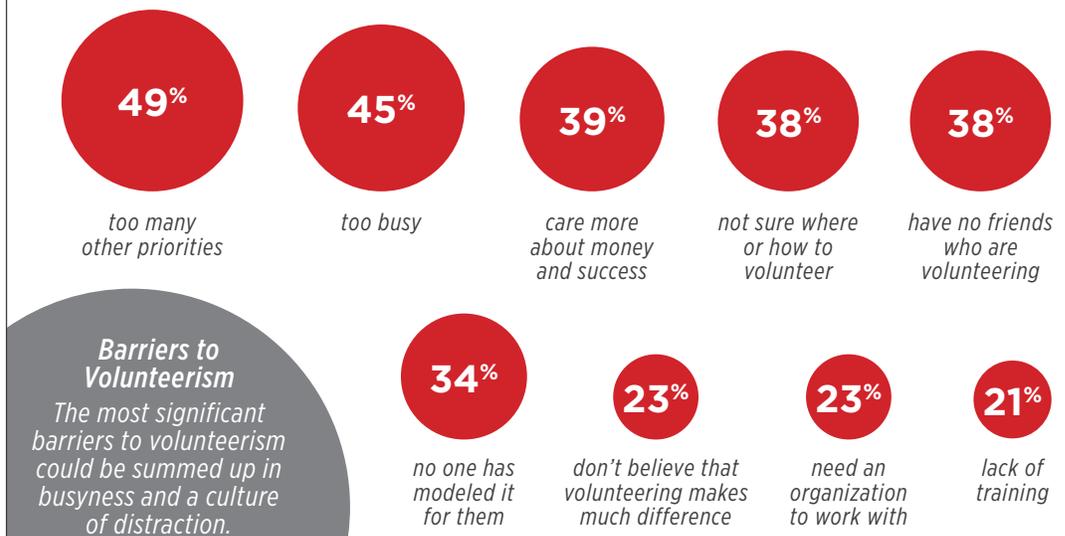
Today's young adults are peer-driven, peer-oriented and peer-motivated. The team approach is very important to this group and communication through social and peer networks is necessary. Their interests center around major causes with less interaction with religious or individual needs. While this group is very interested in volunteer activities, the barriers to participation are their full schedules, their personal success and lack of friends' participation.



Mark how much each activity would make volunteering more appealing to you?
(% very appealing)



Which of the following do you think are barriers to young adults volunteering more? (% a lot)



In the past year, which of the following activities have you done



5. "Cause Consumers" could be part of a social trend based on popularity but not lasting values.

Responses indicate that the actual participation of some of this seeker group may be reflected in low involvement, low engagement activities such as recycling, making socially conscious purchases or "liking" a Facebook cause. Thirty-nine percent (39%) agree that young adults talk more about improving their community than actually participating.

Overall, when it comes to being active in trying to improve your local community, would someone who knows you well say you are?



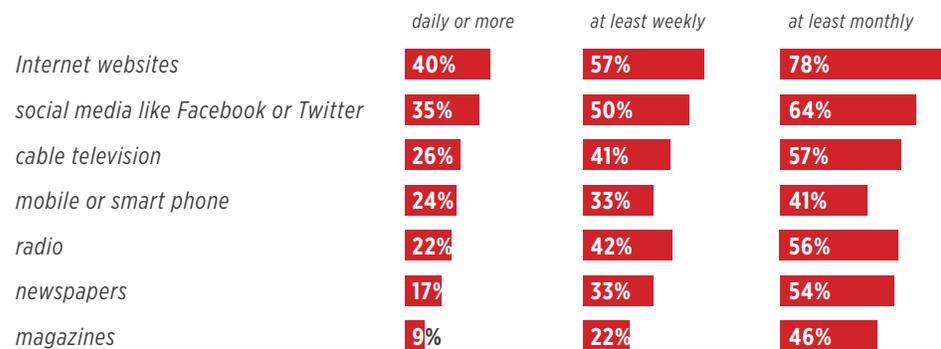
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Young adults talk about wanting to be involved in improving their communities, but most actually don't volunteer.



6. The internet is the primary source of information about issues and causes, with social media and mobile becoming very important delivery vehicles.

While it is common knowledge that the internet is the primary method of research today, a deeper look recognizes the importance of social media and mobile smartphones as access points for information that should not be overlooked. Cable television is still important among young adults because it allows them to access networks that speak to their special interests. Interestingly, only one in five of all seekers has taken action based on a text message or request for donation text.more about improving their community than actually participating.

How often, if ever, do you personally use each of the various media listed below to learn something new or to get information about social issues, causes, or volunteering?



To which media sources, if any, do you turn when you want to learn about social issues and causes?



7. Twenty-five (25%) of seekers aware of The United Methodist Church have a favorable impression of United Methodists, with only 12% citing an unfavorable impression.

The major issue for the denomination is not unfavorable opinion; rather, it is the lack of opinion of United Methodists. The absence of unfavorable opinions provides opportunity for churches willing to engage young adults. The previous Barna study has shown that some of the major barriers to church visitation are impressions of judgmental and hypocritical churches, not knowing anyone/any church and not knowing the beliefs. The ability to engage seekers in like-minded activities offers opportunity for building relationships.

As added confirmation of positive feelings towards The United Methodist Church, Lifeway Research (of the Southern Baptist Convention) conducted research in

September 2011 and found that 62 percent of all Americans have a favorable view of (United) Methodists, compared to 59% for Catholics, and 53% for Southern Baptists.

Sixteen percent of those who have heard of UMC poll are likely to visit a United Methodist church. Another 22% report being neither willing nor unwilling. The greatest opportunity for visitation is among those who have some church fluency – either infrequent (20% likely to visit) or monthly (33% likely to visit). Only 26% adults said that United Methodist congregations were not for them, compared with 35% who found Southern Baptists not suited to them.

Awareness of the Rethink Church campaign and Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. was greater among those 28-34, who have been exposed to the campaigns over longer periods of time. Awareness of Rethink Church is 7% among all seekers and 10% among those who have knowledge of The United Methodist Church. Twenty percent of all seekers and 28% of those aware of The United Methodist Church recognize the tagline Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The more church experience young adults have, the more engaged they are in volunteering and causes. Thus, seekers are disengaged in many ways and it will take “extra” effort to engage them

	none	little	some
volunteered	26%	40%	49%
donated money to a nonprofit	30%	40%	43%
tried to persuade someone else to support a cause you care about	26%	34%	42%

Please indicate your overall impression of The United Methodist Church?



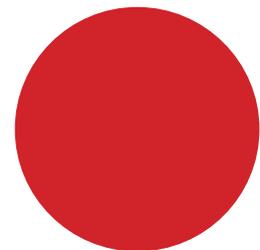
25%

very favorable / somewhat favorable



12%

somewhat unfavorable / very unfavorable

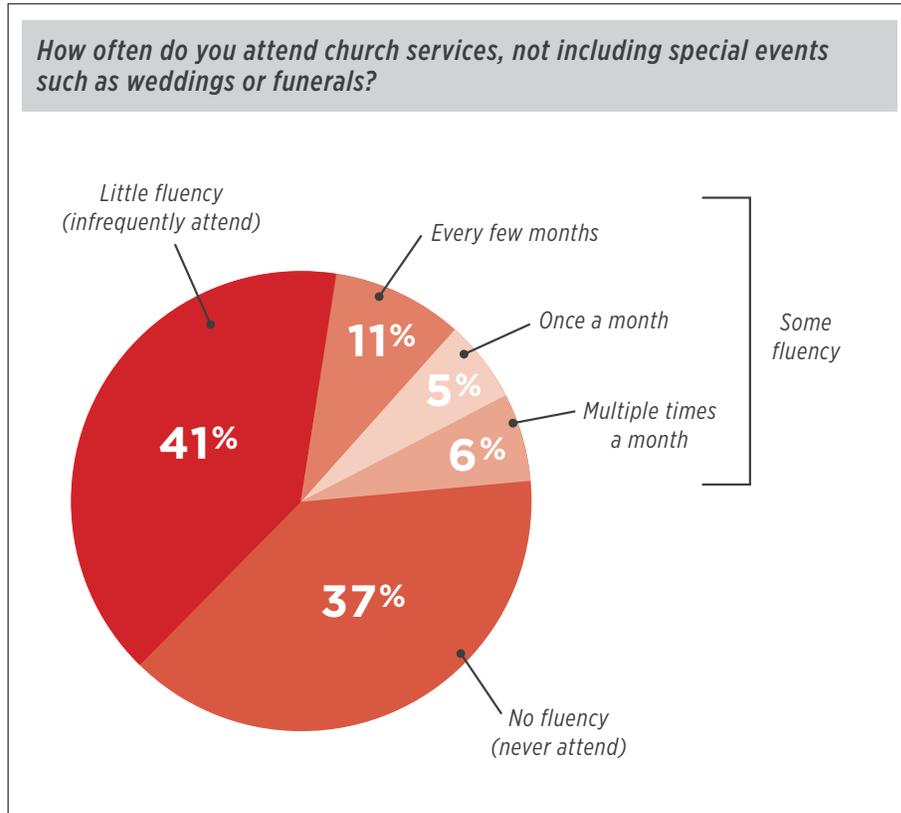


63%

heard or, no opinion

8. Seekers report very low levels of church engagement.

Church engagement of seekers is extremely low, with 78% reporting they never or seldom attend church services. This level of engagement is unchanged from the previous 2009 report. There is no difference in church attendance between those 18-27 and those 28-34.



9. The younger group (18-27) of the Adults 18-34 are more optimistic, more relational and more open to community engagement, but less spiritual.

<p>Mosaic seekers (Gen Y, ages 18-27) are more likely than are Buster seekers (Gen X, ages 28 to 34) to report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> excited about the future something feels missing from your life want to make a difference with your life have a passion for social justice 	<p>Mosaic seekers are more responsive than Buster seekers toward global issues, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ending sex trafficking assisting poor children overseas helping the poor in other countries 	<p>Mosaic seekers are also more interested in the following ways to volunteer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> with friends going on service trip to another country hearing life-changing stories from other volunteers having a life coach or mentor help me serve others better
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Seeker Demographics and Definition

Seeker demographics differ somewhat from all adults 18-34 in the United States. The majority (77%) are single, compared with 65% of all adults 18-34. Only one in four is married, compared with 34% of all adults 18-34. More of them are cohabitating (21% versus 15% of all adults 18-34).

Some 38% of seekers have a child under 18, compared with 55% of all adults 18-34.

In terms of ethnicity, 45% of seekers are non-white (Hispanics compose 21% and African-Americans another 14%). Among all adults 18-34, 40% are non-white.

The UMC target “seeker” audience was defined as follows: those who

- (1) are currently ages 18 to 34,
- (2) do not attend a United Methodist church, and
- (3) is a “seeker,” described as:

An unchurched or marginally churched person who feels like something is missing or who is searching for something spiritually and has a passion for social justice.

A church attender who feels emotional discomfort or who is searching for something spiritually or who indicates he or she is not totally committed to their current church.

A person who meets four or more of the nine specific criteria identified as reflecting seeker attitudes.

Methodology

The research used a national, random and representative sample of young adults across the country, drawn from an online panel. Individuals on the panel were screened to identify people who met the definition of a seeker. The sample of 821 seekers means the research results for the total sample are accurate to within plus or minus 3.5 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. The research was conducted in August 2011.

LOCAL MARKET STUDY

The Rethink Church campaign has joined hands with local church partners to create and promote community events that seek to attract and engage volunteers in providing needed community services. These community services match those that motivate interest from seekers.

In 2010-2011, through the Impact Communities activities, 1,592 churches have participated in 1,013 projects, mobilizing 49,475 volunteers and serving 2,103,306 people. Some 40% of volunteers in these activities have not been members of a United Methodist Church.

To better understand the recognition of such enterprises, United Methodist Communications enlisted The Barna Group to conduct studies to measure the impact these activities have on attitudes towards The United Methodist Church.

The two markets selected were Missouri and Western North Carolina. The Missouri Annual Conference asked United Methodist churches across the state to join together for a statewide weekend of community on Saturday and Sunday, September 10-11, 2011. Nine cities were served by the 238 churches that banded together to provide services that included cleaning up parks to serving meals to homeless. There were 21,000 volunteers serving more than 100,000 persons.

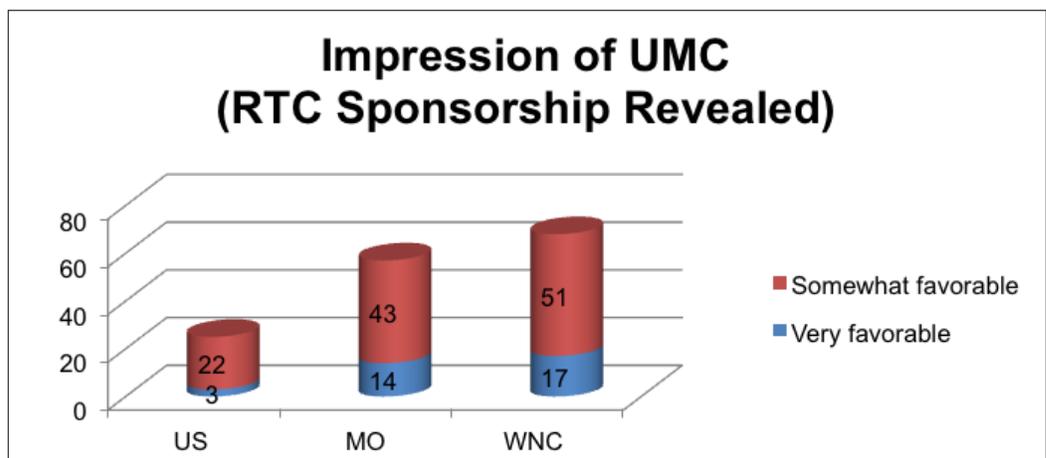
In North Carolina on October 1, 2011, the Western North Carolina organized 421 churches, mobilizing 5,666 volunteers and serving 229,563 persons. The 400-plus projects were varied and brought together volunteers and those with needs in three large cities and ten smaller markets.

Different approaches were taken to support the events and research results reflect these differences. In Missouri, the activities were promoted with grassroot efforts and outdoor billboard locations in the nine communities. In North Carolina, the efforts were supported with television, radio, online advertising, outdoor and direct mail.

Five Things to Know About Engaging Seekers on the Local Level through Rethink Church Activities

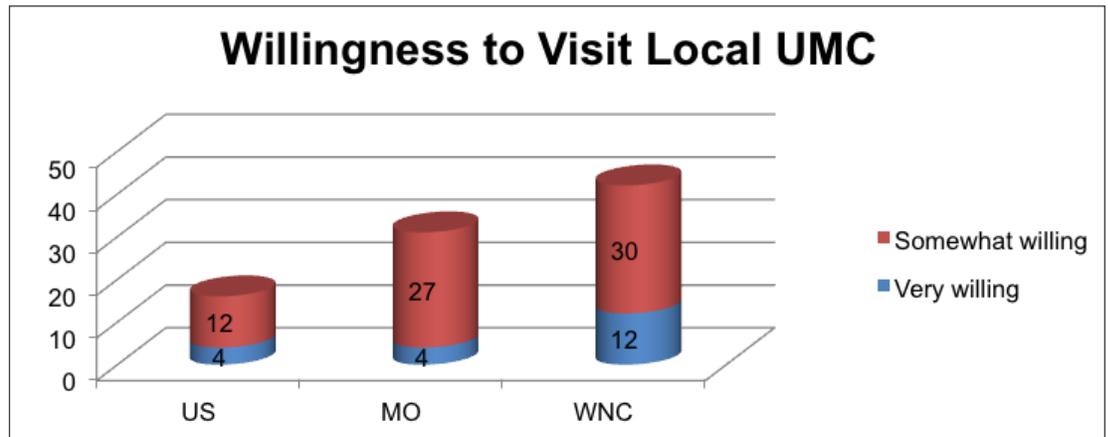
1. Linking local activities to Rethink Church doubled favorable impressions of United Methodists in the test regions.

When the Rethink Church sponsorship was revealed to study participants, their impression of the United Methodist Church grew dramatically.



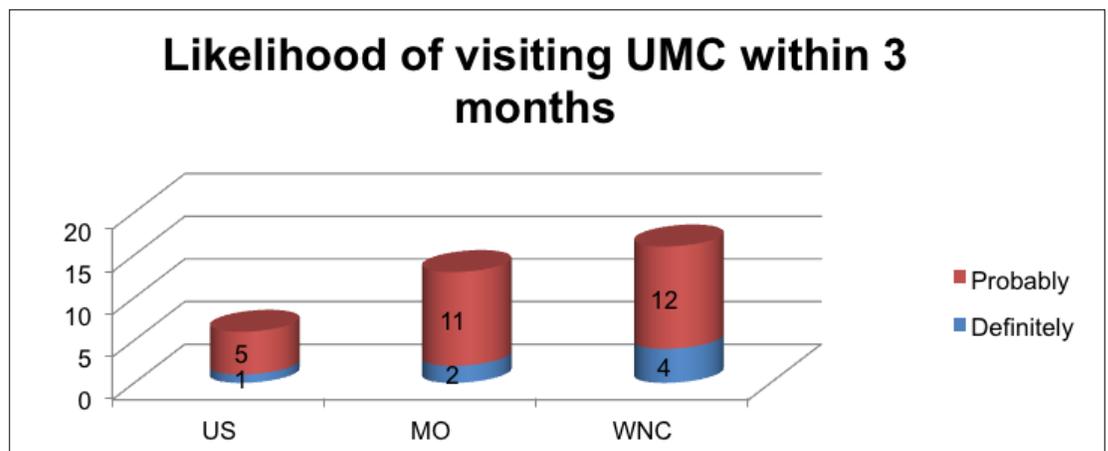
- The impression provided by the Rethink Church activities provided a halo for the participating churches that translated into a willingness to visit a local church.

The willingness to visit was more than double the U.S. results in Missouri and even more likely in Western North Carolina.



- The willingness to visit translates to a stronger likelihood of visiting a church within the next three months.

More than one out of ten in both Missouri and Western North Carolina reported a likelihood of visiting a church within the next three months.



- Providing a media presence for the events accomplishes more than getting volunteers. It provides a positive image for the individual churches and the denomination.

The stronger presence in the Western North Carolina market garnered stronger recognition, favorability and positive attitudes towards The United Methodist Church.

5. Attitudes reflected by those surveyed are those important to seekers.

Among the attitudes towards The United Methodist Church, those reported highest were: care and support of each other, accepting people of all walks of life, care about peace and justice, helping people in your community, and being there for people facing difficulty.

Again, attitudes toward The United Methodist church were seen as stronger in North Carolina, where media was combined with local efforts.

	% Strongly Agree		% Strongly/Somewhat Agree	
	Missouri	WNC	Missouri	WNC
<i>Help people in your community</i>	11	21	48	62
<i>Accept people from all walks of life</i>	13	23	50	61
<i>Care and support each other</i>	15	22	53	64
<i>Welcome people with diverse opinions</i>	14	17	43	48
<i>Show respect for other religions</i>	11	17	38	50
<i>There for people facing difficulty</i>	11	24	48	60
<i>Could help you find deeper meaning</i>	11	19	33	49

Comparable data were not available for the nation as a whole.

Methodology/Summary

United Methodist Communications conducted seeker research in the Missouri and Western North Carolina annual conferences following recent Impact Community campaigns. Western North Carolina closely followed Rethink Church recommendations in planning their events while Missouri modified their approach. Both campaigns occurred in fall 2011.

In each market, the online survey, conducted by the Barna Group, interviewed over 500 seekers of 18 to 34 years of age about their attitudes toward United Methodist churches. The agency conducted the research in November 2011.