



**What does it mean to be United Methodist**



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United Methodist Communications

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



The background of the entire page is a solid red color with a repeating pattern of white question marks of various sizes and orientations.

# **What does it mean to be United Methodist?**

A RESEARCH STUDY BY UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS

TO A DEGREE, THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION DEPENDS ON ONE'S ROLE, KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE. A NEW U.S.-BASED RESEARCH STUDY BY UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS FOUND KEY DIFFERENCES IN INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DENOMINATION'S IDEALS AND VALUES DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE RESPONDENT IS A PASTOR, A CHURCH LEADER OR A MEMBER.



# Summary

When pastors were asked the open-ended question, “Which two or three values are most important?” the most commonly given answers were having Wesleyan theological roots, being a connectional church, and an emphasis on God’s grace.

When church leaders were asked the same question, there were many more different responses and much less agreement. None of the answers showed up very frequently. The top three responses were fellowship with my church (16 percent), bringing people to Christ (14 percent), and emphasis on local mission and outreach (14 percent).

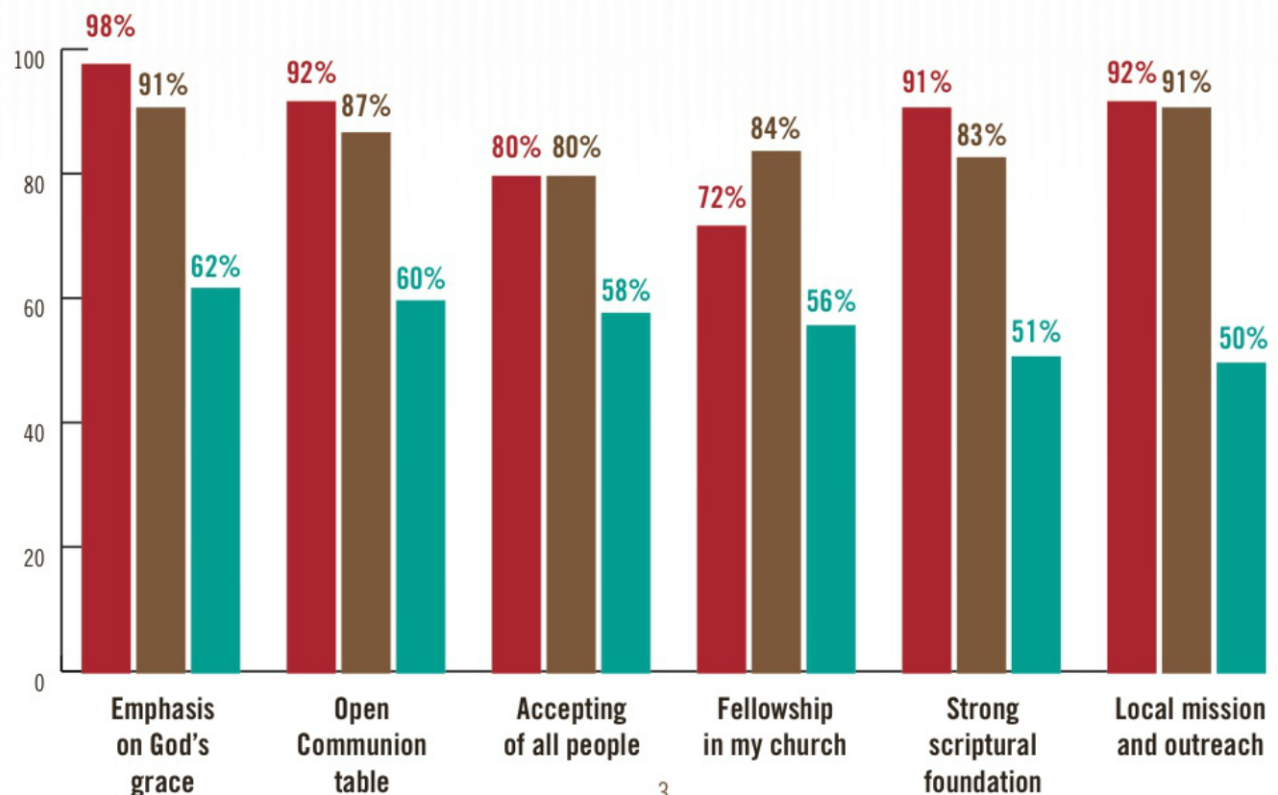
Even within the three sub-groups, there were pronounced differences based on various factors. For pastors, there were significant differences between those trained at United Methodist seminaries and those who were not. Among leaders, men and women saw things differently. And among members, regular attendees had different views than those not in church.

But there are many core values that every group agrees are important for the church, even seen through the lens of different experiences and perspectives.



Percent indicating value is “very important”

## CORE VALUES SEEN AS IMPORTANT BY EVERY GROUP







At least half of all United Methodist pastors, leaders and members surveyed all affirmed that an emphasis on God's grace is "very important," as well as having a Communion table where all are welcome, being accepting of all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or economic circumstances, fellowship in the church, a strong scriptural foundation and local mission and ministry.

### PASTORS TENDED TO STRONGLY EMBRACE MOST OF THE VALUES NAMED. IN FACT, AT LEAST HALF OF ALL PASTORS RANKED 20 OF THE 22 VALUES AS VERY IMPORTANT.

Church leaders perceived most values to be very important but to a lesser degree, followed by members less solidly in agreement. Sixty-two percent was the highest percentage of members who rated a specific value as "very important" to them.

Both leaders and members tended to place higher importance on values related to personal, spiritual and local ministries.

Leaders rated values related to the broader church, such as worldwide missions, being a connectional church, having shared funding, transformation of the world, social justice, and Wesleyan theology lower than pastors did, but higher than members did.

The responses suggest that the more involved one is with the church, the more likely they are to support values identified with the entire denomination as very important. Perhaps leaders are more likely to share pastors' views because their roles bring them into greater contact with the larger denomination and possibly drive more recognition of the importance of the church's work.



# Background



DURING THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 2014, UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATIONS CONDUCTED FOCUS GROUPS WITH PASTORS AND LEADERS IN FOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCES – WEST OHIO, PACIFIC NORTHWEST, GREATER NEW JERSEY, AND SOUTH CAROLINA – TO HELP DEFINE THE SCOPE AND QUESTIONS FOR THIS STUDY.

The focus groups helped define scope of project, language, and key values/attributes for the quantitative study that followed.

The values named in the focus groups (listed below) were used to create a survey where participants were asked to rate the importance of 22 values and ideals on a 5-point scale, ranging from “very important to you” (5) to “not important” (1).

They were also asked to rank the uniqueness of those core values to United Methodists, based on their knowledge of other Christian denominations.

In November – December 2014, a survey was conducted with 1,250 respondents: 400 were members who were interviewed online by a consumer research firm, 350 were phone interviews with local church leaders and 500 were phone interviews with pastors.

Church leaders were primarily members who had or were serving on local church committees; deacons, retired pastors, elders, annual conference district personnel and paid church workers were filtered from the church leader group.

EMPHASIS ON GOD’S GRACE	EMPHASIS ON LOCAL MISSION AND OUTREACH	OPEN COMMUNION TABLE
STRONG SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION	EMPHASIS ON BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHRIST	ADDRESSING NEEDS OF THE POOR
SEEKING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD	ACCEPTING ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES	
EMPHASIS ON WORLDWIDE MISSION AND OUTREACH	PROMOTE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN LEADERS	BALANCE OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS
WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL ROOTS	FELLOWSHIP IN MY CHURCH	BEING OPEN TO QUESTIONING MATTERS OF FAITH
BEING A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH	HEALING THE SICK	IMPORTANCE OF RATIONAL THINKING
BEING ACCEPTING OF DIFFERENT VIEWS	ACTS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	CHURCH TAKING A MORAL STANCE ON ISSUES
FUNDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SHARED GIVING (APPORTIONMENTS)		ECUMENICAL INTERFAITH CONNECTIONS





# Differences Among Groups: PASTORS

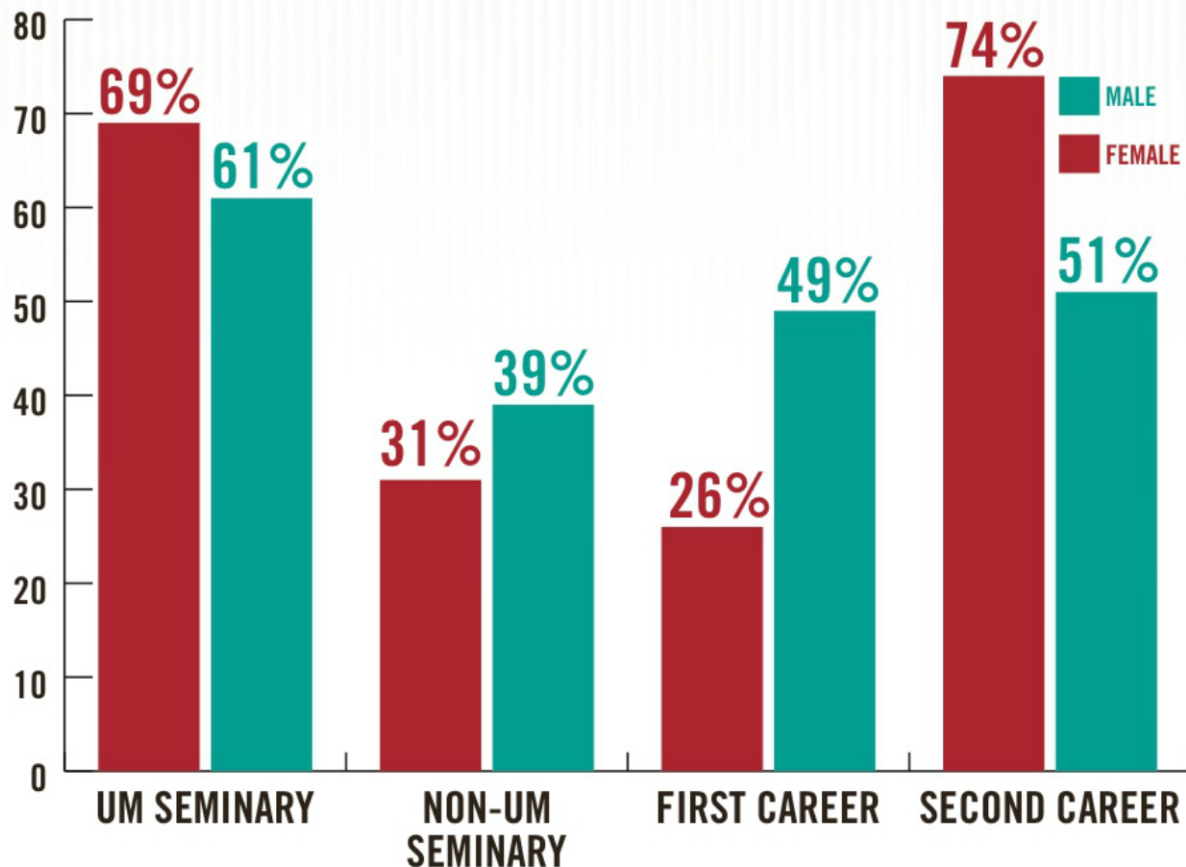
## PASTORS: WHO WE INTERVIEWED

Of the 500 pastors interviewed, seven out of 10 served mid-size churches with attendance of 50-249. Nineteen percent served small churches with less than 50 members, while 11 percent served larger churches with 250 or more in attendance. The overwhelming number of pastor respondents (87 percent) described themselves as white/Caucasian, while 4 percent were African American;

2 percent each for Asian and mixed; one percent each for Hispanic/Latino and Native American, and 3 percent for other/not specified.

The majority of respondents attended a United Methodist seminary – 69 percent of female respondents and 61 percent of male respondents – and nearly three-quarters of females and half of males surveyed were second career pastors.

## PASTORS: CAREER PATH





## PASTORS: WHAT THEY SAID

Pastors of United Methodist churches generally reflect the values the church emphasizes, but some measurable differences in priorities were found in the results.

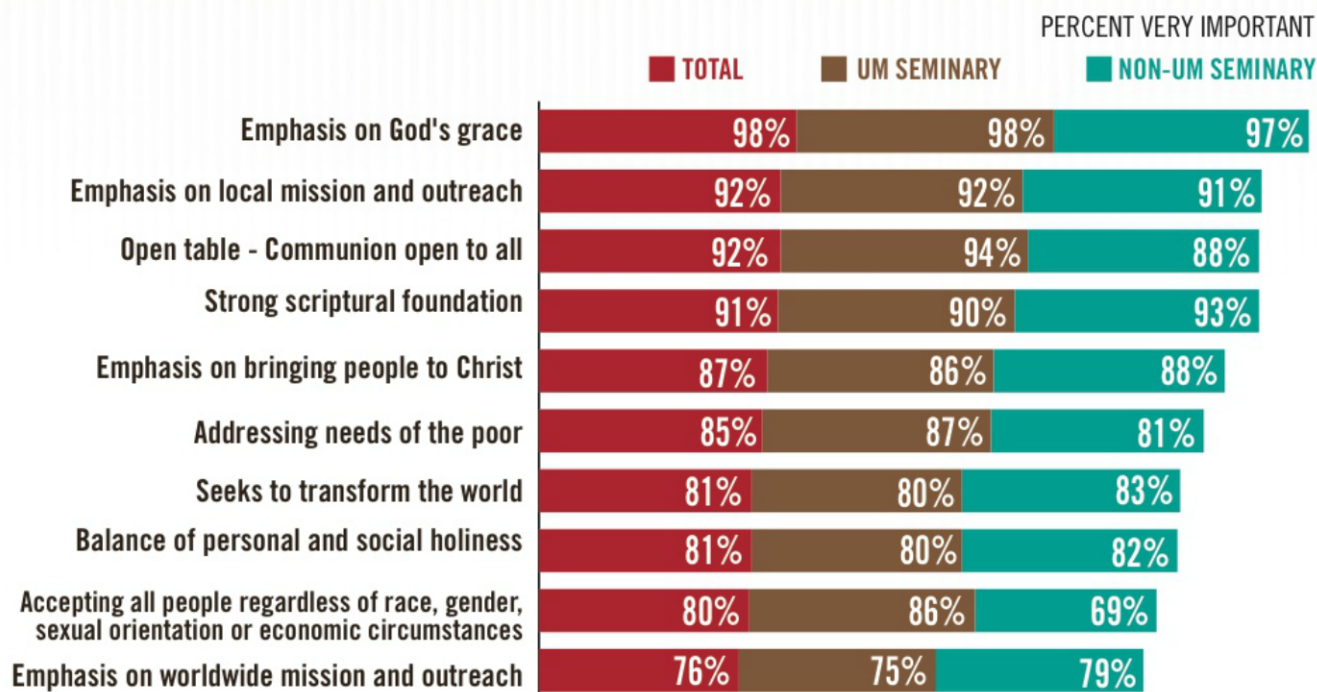
Pastors who are graduates of United Methodist seminaries or courses of studies place different importance on some values from those pastors who have not attended United Methodist seminaries.

Pastors were asked to indicate the importance of shared United Methodist values and ideals.

Eighty-six percent of United Methodist seminary pastors responding indicated “accepting all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or economic circumstances” very important while only 69 percent of those who did not attend United Methodist seminaries rated the category very important.

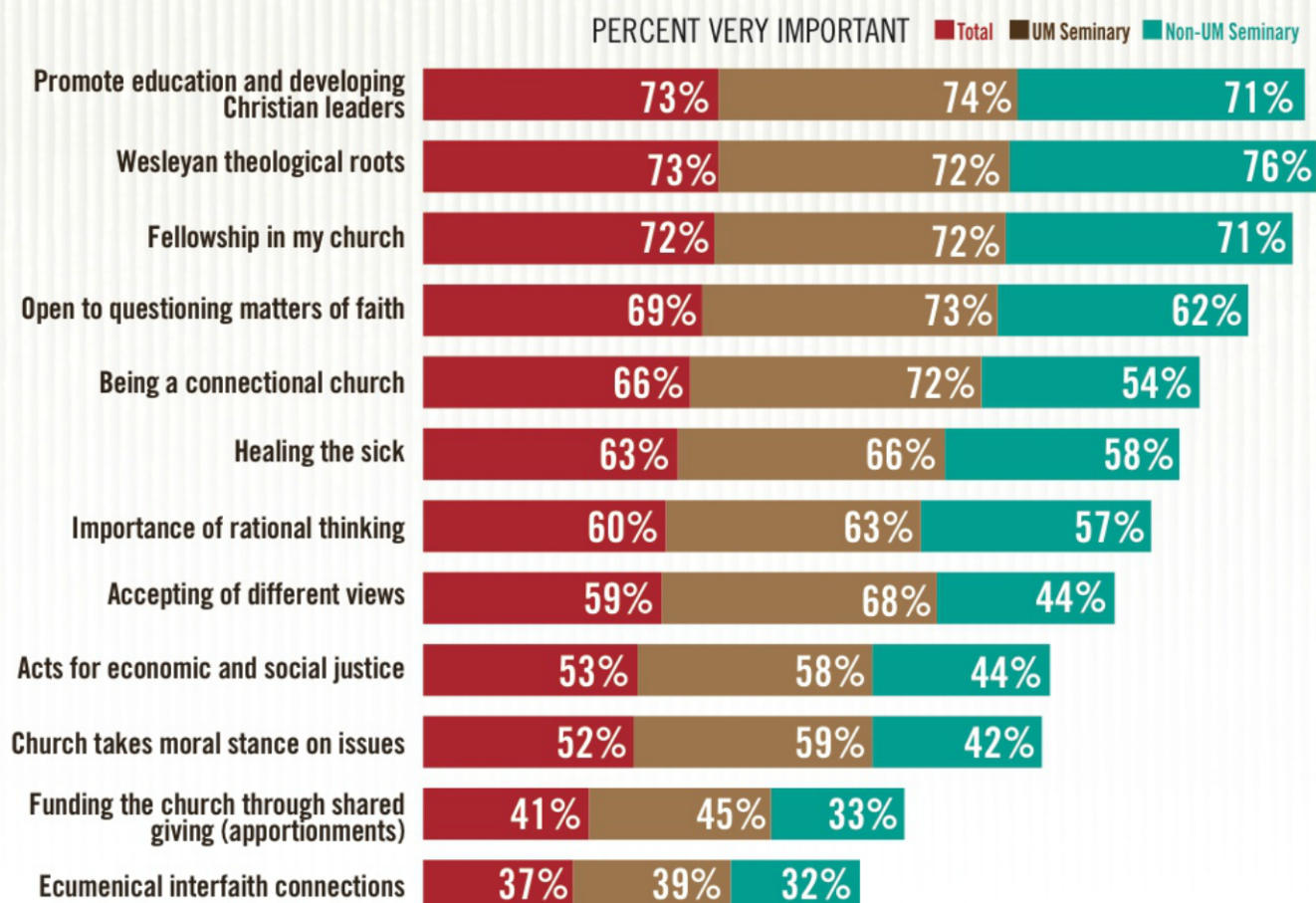
## PASTORS: TOP 10 VALUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

QUESTION: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAS A CULTURE BASED ON SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THESE VALUES ARE TO YOU.



# PASTORS: OTHER VALUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

QUESTION: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAS A CULTURE BASED ON SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THESE VALUES ARE TO YOU.



An “open table — Communion open to all” elicited a “very important” from 94 percent of United Methodist seminary graduates and 88 percent of those who did not attend United Methodist seminaries. “Open to questioning matters of faith” found a gap of 11 points with United Methodist seminary grads giving higher values. United Methodist seminary graduates also ranked higher “being a connectional church” by 18 points; “accepting of different views” by 24 points; “acts for economic and social justice” by 14 points;

“church takes moral stance on issues” by 17 points and “funding the church through shared giving (apportionments)” by 12 points.

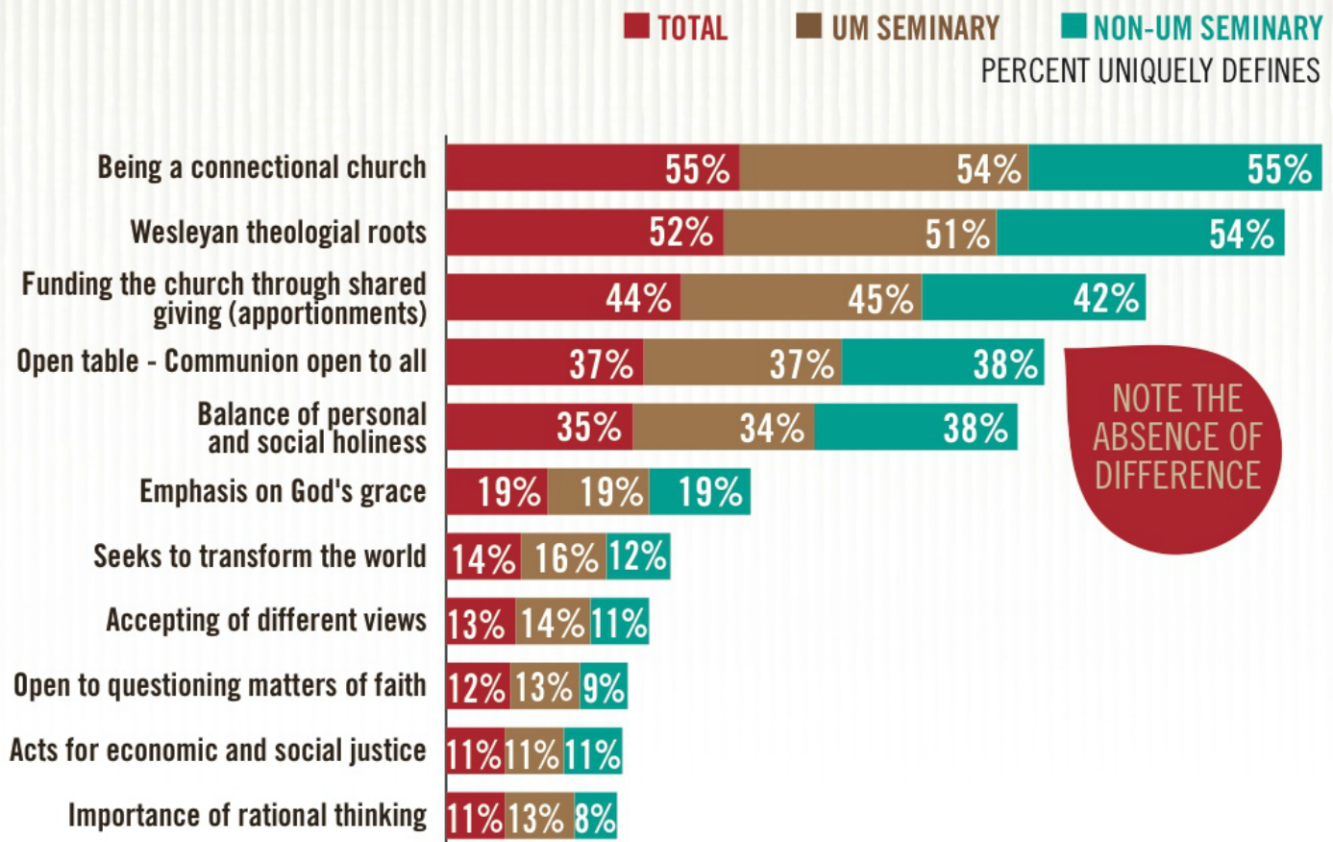
When it came to which core values uniquely define The United Methodist Church, there was little difference of views between respondents, no matter where they were trained. Only two values -- being a connectional church and having Wesleyan theological roots -- were seen as unique by at least half of pastors.



<b>PASTORS: IMPORTANCE &amp; UNIQUENESS</b>	<b>PERCENT VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>PERCENT UNIQUE</b>
EMPHASIS ON GOD'S GRACE	98	19
EMPHASIS ON LOCAL MISSION AND OUTREACH	92	6
OPEN TABLE - COMMUNION OPEN TO ALL	92	37
STRONG SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION	91	5
EMPHASIS ON BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHRIST	87	3
ADDRESSING NEEDS OF THE POOR	85	4
SEEKS TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD	81	14
BALANCE OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS	81	35
ACCEPTING ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES	80	8
EMPHASIS ON WORLDWIDE MISSION AND OUTREACH	76	8
PROMOTE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN LEADERS	73	6
WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL ROOTS	73	52
FELLOWSHIP IN MY CHURCH	72	5
OPEN TO QUESTIONING MATTERS OF FAITH	69	12
BEING A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH	66	55
HEALING THE SICK	63	3
IMPORTANCE OF RATIONAL THINKING	60	11
ACCEPTING OF DIFFERENT VIEWS	59	13
ACTS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	53	11
CHURCH TAKES MORAL STANCE ON ISSUES	52	8
FUNDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SHARED GIVING (APPORTIONMENTS)	41	44
ECUMENICAL INTERFAITH CONNECTIONS	37	8

# PASTORS: UNIQUENESS OF KEY VALUES OF THE CHURCH (TOP-RATED)

QUESTION: GIVEN WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, HOW UNIQUE ARE THESE CORE VALUES TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?







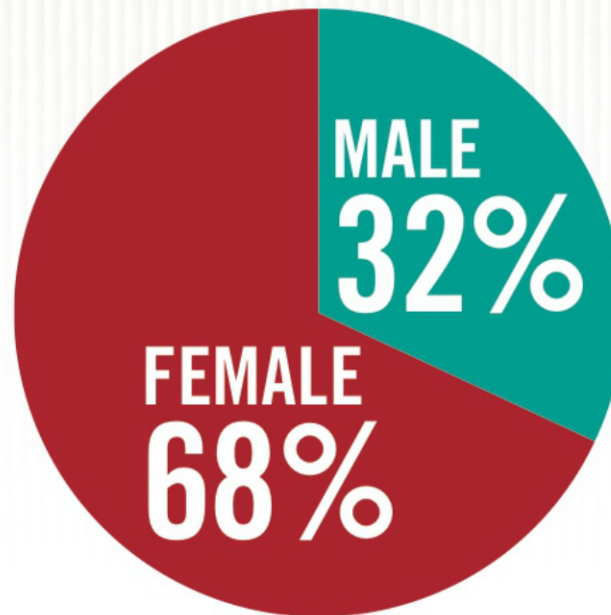
# Differences Among Groups: CHURCH LEADERS

## CHURCH LEADERS: WHO WE INTERVIEWED

Of the 350 leaders responding to the survey, 86 percent identified themselves as white/Caucasian, 7 percent as African American, 4 percent as other/not specified and 1 percent each as Hispanic/Latino, mixed and Native American. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were female and 32 percent were male.

Fifty-eight percent of the leader respondents were from churches with an average weekly attendance of 50 to 249 with exactly half from churches of 50 to 99 and half from churches of 100 to 249. Slightly less — 28 percent — were from churches with less than 50. Ten percent were from churches of 250 to 449 and 4 percent were from churches of 500 or more.

## LEADERS: GENDER



## CHURCH LEADERS: WHAT THEY SAID

The views of leaders mirrored those of pastors on many values but tended to give higher ratings to personal, spiritual and local ministries. Values that are perceived to be unique to The United Methodist Church, such as Wesleyan theology, the connectional church and shared funding, were generally seen as less important. When asked to identify the top shared core values of

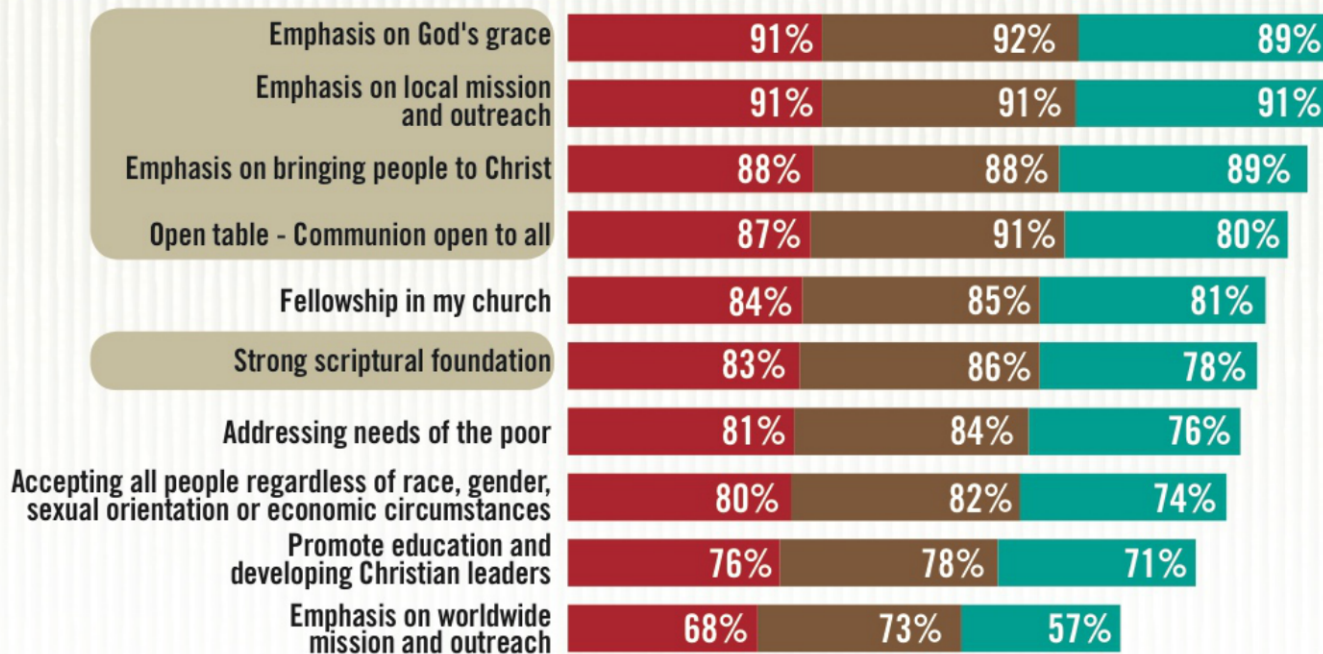
the church, church leaders identified with five of the six selected by the pastor group: emphasis on God's grace, emphasis on local mission and outreach, emphasis on bringing people to Christ, Communion open to all, and strong scriptural foundation. Church fellowship is very important to church leaders, even more so than pastors, at 84 percent compared to 72 percent.

# LEADERS: TOP 10 VALUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

QUESTION: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAS A CULTURE BASED ON SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THESE VALUES ARE TO YOU.

## FIVE OF TOP SIX SAME AS PASTORS

PERCENT VERY IMPORTANT ■ TOTAL ■ FEMALE ■ MALE



## BUT, SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF MEN AND WOMEN.

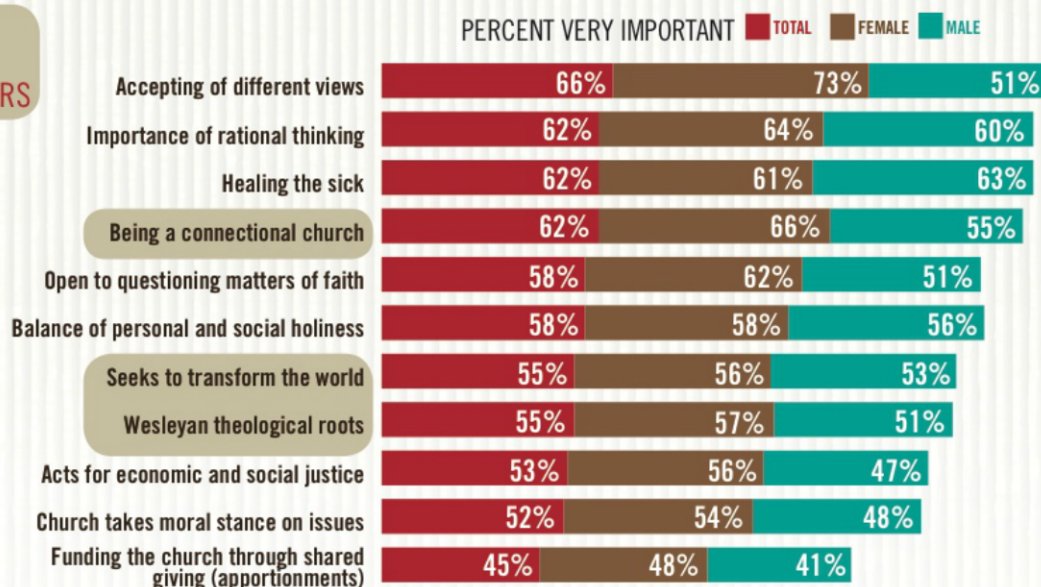
- While 87 percent of the respondents ranked "open table — Communion open to all" as very important, female respondents (91 percent) ranked the value 11 points higher than male respondents (80 percent).
- Eighty-three percent of respondents ranked a "strong scriptural foundation" as very important with female respondents (86 percent) higher than males (78 percent).
- Eighty-one percent saw "addressing the needs of the poor" as a high priority with females (84 percent) higher than males (76 percent).
- "Accepting all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or economic circumstances" was ranked very important but the gap between females (82 percent) and males (74 percent) was eight points.
- An "emphasis on worldwide mission and outreach" ranked very important to 68 percent of all respondents but a 16-point gap existed between females (73 percent) and males (57 percent).
- "Accepting of different views" was ranked very important by 66 percent but females (73 percent) and males (51 percent) differed by 22 points.
- "Being a connectional church" was important to 62 percent but women (66 percent) and men (55 percent) differed by 11 points.
- "Openness to questioning matters of faith" was very important to 58 percent of respondents but an 11-point gap existed between women (62 percent) and men (51 percent).
- Women (56 percent) and men (47 percent) differed by nine points on "acts for economic and social justice" although 53 percent of respondents rated the value important.
- While 58 percent of respondents ranked Wesleyan theological roots as important, females (63 percent) and males (57 percent) were divided by six points.
- Funding the church through shared giving (apportionments) was ranked important by only 29 percent with women (34) and men (20) split by 14 points.



## LEADERS: OTHER VALUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

QUESTION: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAS A CULTURE BASED ON SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THESE VALUES ARE TO YOU.

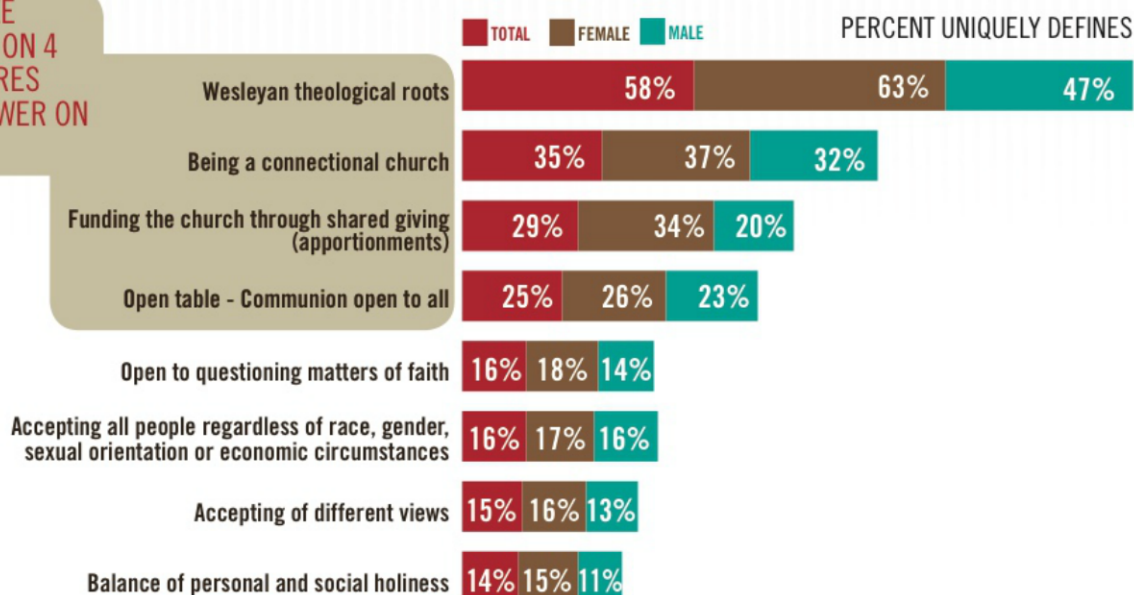
KEY VALUES FOR UMC NOT SEEN AS IMPORTANT AS OTHERS



## LEADERS: UNIQUENESS OF KEY VALUES OF THE CHURCH (TOP-RATED)

QUESTION: GIVEN WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, HOW UNIQUE ARE THESE CORE VALUES TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

LEADERS AGREE WITH PASTORS ON 4 OF 5, BUT SCORES GENERALLY LOWER ON UNIQUENESS



Church leaders had similar views as pastors when it came to uniqueness of values, agreeing with pastors on their top four responses, though at generally

lower percentages. The three values that the highest percentage of church leaders named as unique were, respectively, having Wesleyan theological roots,

being a connectional church, and funding through apportionments, but those values were not seen as particularly important by a large percentage of

church leaders. Having open Communion was a highly-regarded value that was also seen as unique by one-quarter of church leaders.

<b>LEADERS: IMPORTANCE &amp; UNIQUENESS</b>	<b>PERCENT VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>PERCENT UNIQUE</b>
EMPHASIS ON GOD'S GRACE	91	12
EMPHASIS ON LOCAL MISSION AND OUTREACH	91	9
EMPHASIS ON BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHRIST	88	7
OPEN TABLE - COMMUNION OPEN TO ALL	87	25
FELLOWSHIP IN MY CHURCH	84	11
STRONG SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION	83	6
ADDRESSING NEEDS OF THE POOR	81	7
ACCEPTING ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES	80	16
PROMOTE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN LEADERS	76	10
EMPHASIS ON WORLDWIDE MISSION AND OUTREACH	68	11
ACCEPTING OF DIFFERENT VIEWS	66	15
IMPORTANCE OF RATIONAL THINKING	62	12
HEALING THE SICK	62	4
BEING A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH	62	35
OPEN TO QUESTIONING MATTERS OF FAITH	58	16
BALANCE OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS	58	14
SEEKS TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD	55	12
WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL ROOTS	55	58
ACTS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	53	11
CHURCH TAKES MORAL STANCE ON ISSUES	52	7
FUNDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SHARED GIVING (APPORTIONMENTS)	45	29
ECUMENICAL INTERFAITH CONNECTIONS	39	12





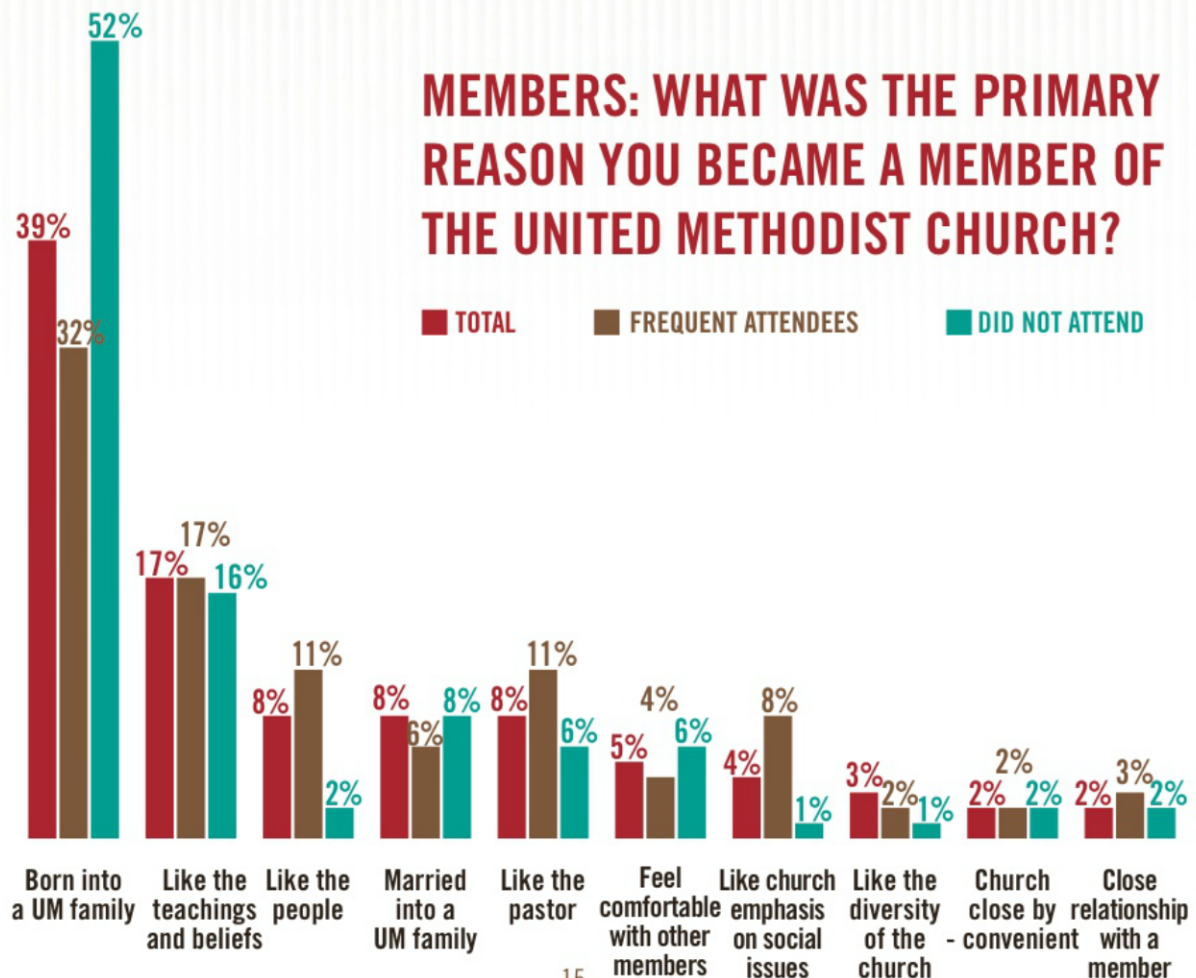
# Differences Among Groups: CHURCH MEMBERS

## MEMBERS: WHO WE INTERVIEWED

The member respondents were overwhelmingly white/Caucasian at 92 percent. Four percent were African American and 1 percent each were Hispanic/Latino, Native American, mixed and other/not specified. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were female and 41 percent were male. Church size was not tracked for this category. Almost half – 49 percent – of respondents fell between the ages of 45 and 64, with 26 percent being younger and 25 percent being older. Only 2 percent were between the ages of 18-24. Three-quarters of respondents were long-term members of the denomination -- more than 11 years -- and more than half had

been members for 26+ years. Only 8 percent of those surveyed had membership for less than two years. Thirty-nine percent of the 400 member respondents indicated they were born into United Methodist families. But, being born into a United Methodist family is not necessarily an indicator of frequent participation in church. Of that 39 percent, 32 percent were frequent attendees and 52 percent did not attend but were still on United Methodist member lists. Beliefs and teachings were the second most frequently mentioned reasons for becoming a member (17 percent), followed equally by liking the people, liking the pastor, or marrying into a United Methodist family (all at 8 percent each).

## MEMBERS: WHAT WAS THE PRIMARY REASON YOU BECAME A MEMBER OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?



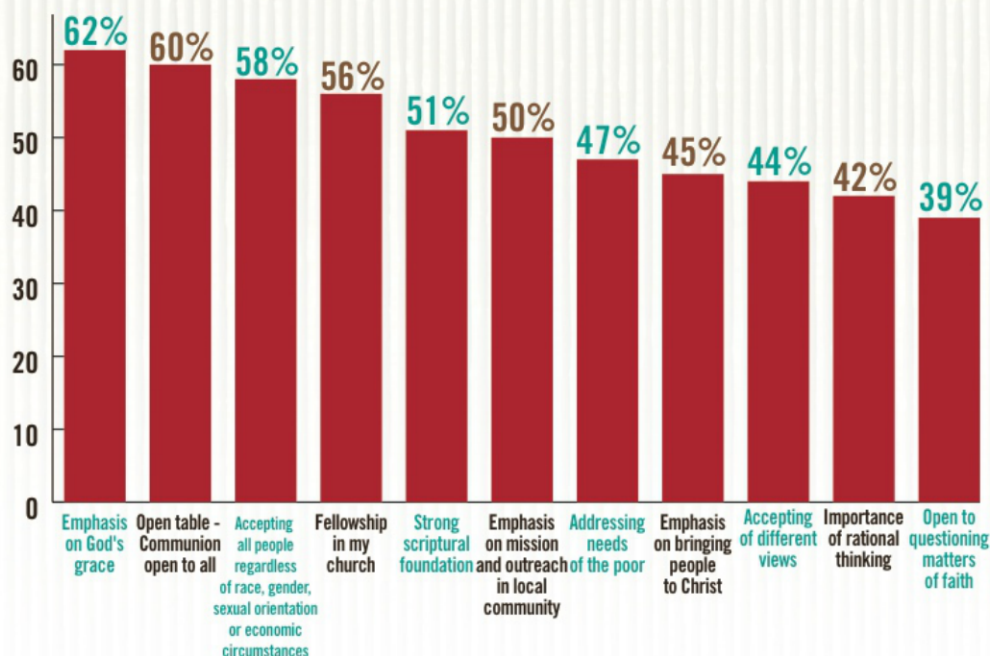
## MEMBERS: WHAT THEY SAID

Members tended to rank values related to openness, acceptance, fellowship and helping others most highly; but still at percentages that were lower than pastors and leaders. Many of the more important values were also ranked highly by pastors and leaders, e.g. emphasis on God's grace, open table, accepting of all people, fellowship, strong scriptural foundation, and local missions and outreach. Member respondents

did not rank some of the key values associated with The United Methodist Church as high as pastor or leader respondents ranked those values. For instance, only 30 percent ranked "being a connectional church" very important, 23 percent ranked "seeks to transform the world" very important, 19 percent ranked "Wesleyan roots" as very important, and 18 percent ranked "funding the church through shared giving (apportionments)" as important.

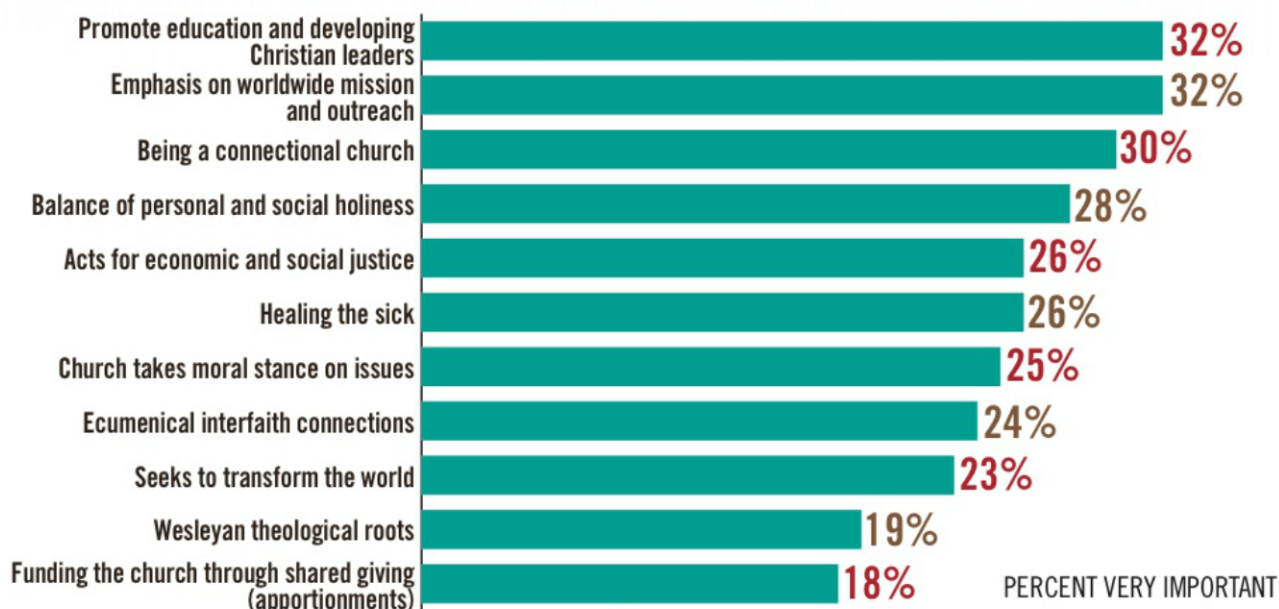
## MEMBERS: MOST IMPORTANT VALUES OF THE UMC

PERCENT VERY IMPORTANT



## MEMBERS: OTHER VALUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

QUESTION: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAS A CULTURE BASED ON SHARED VALUES AND IDEALS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THESE VALUES ARE TO YOU



PERCENT VERY IMPORTANT



Major differences in perspectives exist between frequent church attendees (three to four times in past month) and those who did not attend at all, although some values were ranked similarly regardless of how often they were in church.

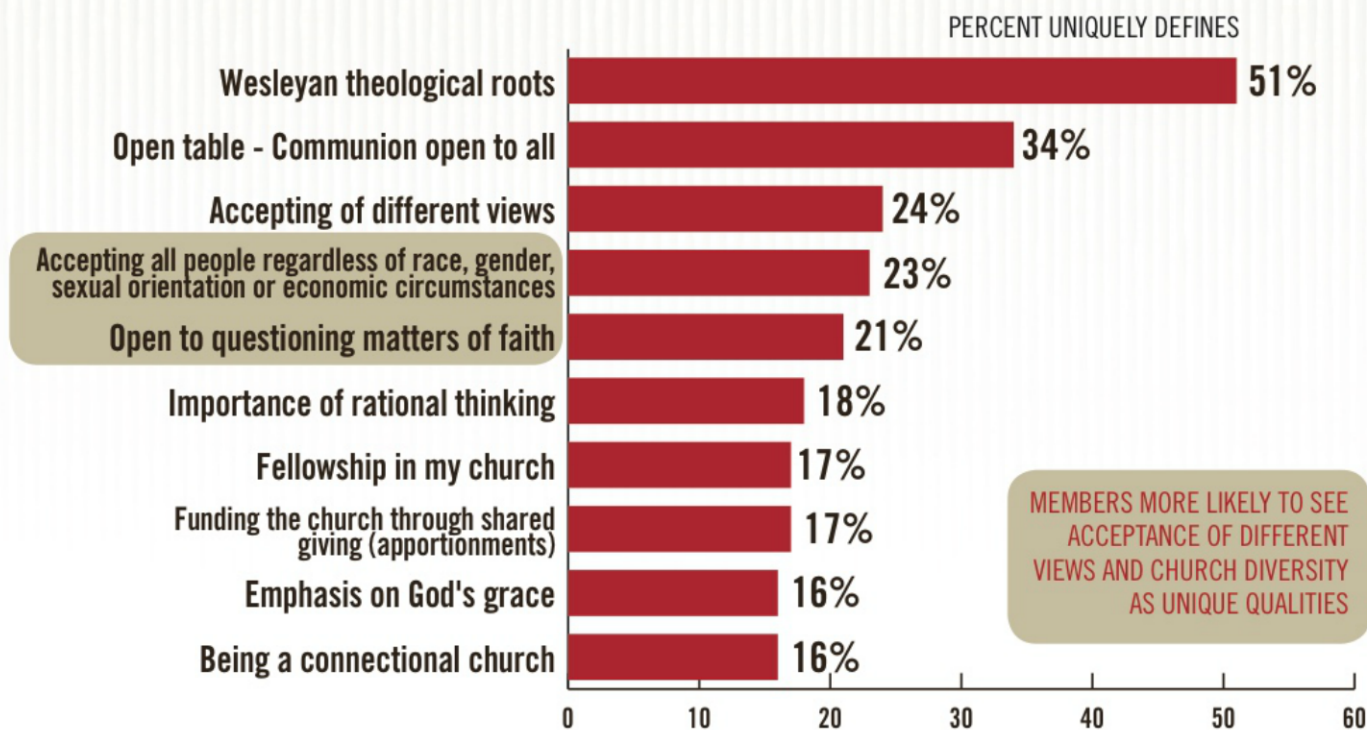
<b>MEMBERS: MOST IMPORTANT VALUES FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>FREQUENT ATTENDEES</b>	<b>DID NOT ATTEND</b>	<b>DIFFE- RENCE</b>
STRONG SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION	51	68	34	-34
EMPHASIS ON GOD'S GRACE	62	77	45	-32
EMPHASIS ON BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHRIST	45	60	30	-30
FELLOWSHIP IN MY CHURCH	56	68	42	-26
EMPHASIS ON LOCAL MISSION AND OUTREACH	50	62	37	-25
EMPHASIS ON WORLDWIDE MISSION AND OUTREACH	32	46	22	-24
OPEN TABLE - COMMUNION OPEN TO ALL	60	70	49	-21
ADDRESSING NEEDS OF THE POOR	47	56	36	-20
BEING A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH	30	38	22	-16
PROMOTE EDUCATION & DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN LEADERS	32	38	24	-14
CHURCH TAKES MORAL STANCE ON ISSUES	25	33	19	-14
SEEKS TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD	23	31	17	-14
ACTS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	26	33	20	-13
FUNDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SHARED GIVING (APPORTIONMENTS)	18	25	12	-13
WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL ROOTS	19	25	13	-12
ECUMENICAL INTERFAITH CONNECTIONS	24	30	19	-11
BALANCE OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS	28	32	24	-8
IMPORTANCE OF RATIONAL THINKING	42	44	42	-2
HEALING THE SICK	26	28	26	-2
OPEN TO QUESTIONING MATTERS OF FAITH	39	38	37	-1
ACCEPTING ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES	58	55	57	2
ACCEPTING OF DIFFERENT VIEWS	44	41	43	2

Some of the values members considered unique were seen as less so by the other groups. When asked the question “Given what you know about other Christian denominations, how unique are these core values to The United Methodist Church?” 24 percent of members saw being “accepting of different views” and 23 percent saw

“accepting all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or economic circumstances” as unique qualities. Those numbers compare with the 16 percent and 15 percent rankings respectively from church leaders and the 8 percent and 12 percent rankings respectively from pastors.

## MEMBERS: UNIQUENESS OF KEY VALUES OF THE CHURCH

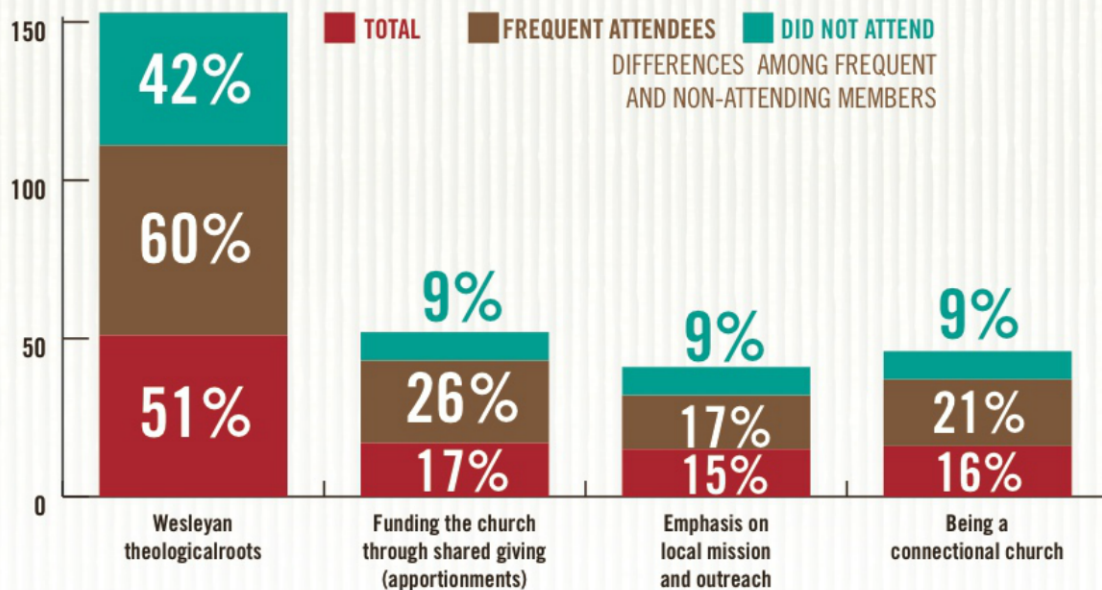
QUESTION: GIVEN WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, HOW UNIQUE ARE THESE CORE VALUES TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?





## MEMBERS: UNIQUENESS OF KEY VALUES OF THE CHURCH

QUESTION: GIVEN WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, HOW UNIQUE ARE THESE CORE VALUES TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?



## MEMBERS: IMPORTANCE & UNIQUENESS (TOP-RATED)

