



The people of The United Methodist Church®



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## **United Methodists Launch Pioneering Social Network Site** *UMC.org to house faith-based social networking site*

**Washington, D.C.** — United Methodist Communications announces the launch of UMC.org, the redesigned and enhanced Web site for the people of The United Methodist Church and those seeking to know more about the church. UMC.org is home to the first large-scale social networking site developed for people of faith. The site, unveiled at a press conference today, includes a variety of new features to help connect people around the world.

More than two years in development, the site includes a number of innovations, including its online, faith-based community and social network that allows visitors to connect with one another online 24 hours a day from their homes, their offices, or even the local coffee shop.

“UMC.org is more than a Web site—it’s about relationships and bringing people of faith together in innovative new ways,” explained the Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications in Nashville. “Now, information about spiritual enrichment is as easy as the click of a mouse.”

The social network at UMC.org provides a venue for people with wide-ranging beliefs to engage in online faith discussions at their convenience. Members can keep each other up-to-date on events and other church news, stay connected with friends in other parts of the world, and keep in touch between worship and other church meetings. UMC.org’s online community fosters meaningful relationships within the global church community, while offering resources to help visitors learn about and interact with the church and its members.

Visitors to the social networking part of the site can set up personal profiles, upload photos and establish networks of friends – just like at other social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook. The difference at UMC.org community is the commitment to online safety and mutual respect.

The online community, developed by Brick River Technologies, has filters that edit out offensive language, a minimum age requirement of 13 years old, security technology review by senior professionals, manual review of photo and video content, and a self-monitoring approach that allows users to flag the content of inappropriate posts for review by an administrator.

Among the site’s other features are:

- “Leader Resources,” which give church leaders the tools to lead more effectively.
- “Our People” section, where visitors can identify their own personal spiritual gifts, see how they can use their individual talents to make a difference, and read inspirational stories of faith about members of The United Methodist Church.
- “Find-A-Church,” which helps visitors identify a United Methodist Church in any community in the United States.
- “Pray” tab, where visitors can submit a prayer request asking others to remember their needs in their prayers.
- “Serve” section, which helps people connect with volunteer opportunities in their communities.
- An online community where you can establish a profile, create a blog, name others as “friends,” and search for volunteer opportunities, worship materials, and a lot more.

Hot Studio, the design company that developed the site, recognized the project as one of its most complex because of the diverse needs of a global denomination. To assure those needs were met, the site’s design and architecture were directed by users’ feedback and input. Visitors should find UMC.org easy and comfortable to use at work and home.

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“Our goal with the new site has always been to build a website that reflects the church’s concern for supportive community,” said Hollon. “By basing the site on user input, and adding exciting new Web innovations, we feel we have developed the foundation for just such a site in UMC.org.”

For more information, visit [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org).

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#### **About The United Methodist Church**

*The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 when The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church united. Today, The United Methodist Church has more than 8.3 million members in the U.S. and nearly 11 million internationally. It is the second largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The General Commission on Communication is charged with planning and implementing the official United Methodist presence on and use of the Internet.*

#### **About Hot Studio**

*Hot Studio, a San Francisco-based user-centered design studio, solves complex design problems by creating elegant, astute systems that serve human understanding and meet human needs. Hot Studio offers analysis, strategy, information design, branding and identity development. Hot designs and produces websites, books, online and offline marketing collateral, wireless and mobile applications and more for its clients, which include Charles Schwab, The Gap, Inc., Sun Microsystems and PCWorld. Hot Studio was recently ranked number two in a list of the top branding and design consulting firms in the Bay area by the San Francisco Business Journal. For more information about Hot Studio, please visit [www.hotstudio.com](http://www.hotstudio.com).*

#### **About Brick River**

*Since 1996, the professionals at Brick River Technologies have been creating powerful and effective Web-based solutions from e-mail management to comprehensive e-commerce web sites for clients of all sizes. In that time, the company has steadily built a reputation for quality and extraordinary results by focusing on its core competencies: Web design and application development.*