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Agency: GCOM

Title: Report on the 2001-2004 Research Plan for The United Methodist Church and Proposed 2005-2008 Research Plan

Financial Implications: None

## Report No. 15

Petition Number:

### **REPORT ON THE 2001-2004 RESEARCH PLAN FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND PROPOSED 2005-2008 RESEARCH PLAN**

#### **Mandate**

The 2000 General Conference approved Calendar Item 1195, endorsing the Research Plan for The United Methodist Church. The purpose of the Research Plan for The United Methodist Church was to provide for a collaborative plan of research and planning on behalf of the general agencies and institutions of The United Methodist Church for the benefit of the entire church.

The plan was initiated by the General Council on Ministries (GCOM), on behalf of the Interagency Research Task Force, in accordance with GCOM's Disciplinary responsibilities:

*To facilitate informed decision-making at all levels of the Church by engaging in research and planning in cooperation with the general agencies and the annual conferences. (§ 905.4), and  
To give leadership to and participate in planning and research for The United Methodist Church, thereby helping all levels of the Church to evaluate needs, set goals, and plan strategy; to coordinate planning and research for the denomination in cooperation with the general program agencies of The United Methodist Church; and to maintain a list of research and planning documents received from the general program agencies and the annual conferences (§906.17).*

The General Council on Ministries provided funds of approximately \$257,000 from its 2001-2004 quadrennial budget and also cared for the staffing needs for this Research Plan.

The 2000 General Conference did not approve the additional funding request of \$475,000 for this research plan.

#### **Process and Implementation, 2001-2004**

In response to this General Conference action, the GCOM set in motion a consultation between The Office of Research & Planning, and the Interagency Research Task Force. The Interagency Research Task Force emerged during the 1997-2000 quadrennium, as the General Council on Ministries brought together other researchers from throughout the connection to share contacts and ideas.

The Office of Research & Planning, GCOM, and the Interagency Research Task Force met throughout the quadrennium, both in person and by conference call, to plan and implement the Research Plan. This planning and implementation focused on the four goals of the Research Plan:

1. The creation of a United Methodist Committee on Research and Planning by calling together researchers from across the denomination on a regular basis to develop and review a model of research and planning for the denomination; coordinate research and determine additional areas for

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- possible research; and coordinate the dissemination of denominational research through various channels and media;
2. The hosting of a United Methodist Forum on the Future by facilitate a gathering of researchers and church leaders by May of 2002 to gather information about the future. Subject matter would be determined by the United Methodist Committee on Research and Planning in light of data gathered at the 2000 General Conference and other sources.
  3. The hosting of a United Methodist Central Conference Forum on Research by facilitating a gathering of central conference researchers and church leaders by May of 2003, to be held in a central conference. The forum will be designed in cooperation with central conference researchers. The goal will be to identify research needs in the central conferences, and might also include training in research methods to assist in the development of additional researchers.
  4. The continued support of The Office of Research & Planning, GCOM, in its role of research activities that look at the larger picture and broader issues and to facilitate the dissemination of research information being done in other arenas.

These four goals were met throughout the course of the quadrennium:

1. The Interagency Research Task Force met in 2001 and 2002 to share resources and information. A booklet, *The UMC Research Resource Directory*, has been created highlighting the research services of the various general agencies. Likewise, online resources and links can be found at [www.gcom-umc.org/research](http://www.gcom-umc.org/research).
2. United Methodist Forum on the Future: Lacking funds to host a “traditional” conference of individuals in one location, the Interagency Research Network opted for two Forums on the Future to be broadcast over the Internet. These two Forums, produced in 2003, focused on the theme, “What in the World Are We Talking About? Strengthening Our Global Connection and Ecumenical Relationships.” Over 1,000 persons logged on to hear the two webcasts.
3. Lack of funding from the 2000 General Conference prevented the hosting of a central conference forum. Nevertheless, representatives from the African central conferences participated in the United Methodist Research Network and presented reports of ongoing work in the central conferences.
4. The Office of Research & Planning, GCOM, continued to provide broad research services through participation in the Faith Communities Today project and the United States Congregational Life Survey.

### **Proposed Research Plan, 2005-2008**

The Research Plan, facilitated by The Office of Research & Planning, GCOM, and the United Methodist Research Network, will

1. Provide leadership to and participate in planning and research for The United Methodist Church, thereby helping all levels of the church to evaluate needs, set goals, and plan strategy; by
  - a. *Monitoring and tracking denominational trends through national surveys, such projects, as Faith Communities Today; the United States Congregational Life Survey; and National Survey of Leadership in Latino Parishes and Congregations*
  - b. *Studying the characteristics of the world's population (demographic, economic, religious, and political) and report past, present, and possible future trends.*

