

Worship attendance returns to normal two months after Sept. 11

(RNS) Attendance at houses of worship appears to have returned to normal levels after a short surge related to the events of Sept. 11, pollsters have found.

The Gallup Poll reported that 47 percent of adults surveyed Sept. 21-22 said they had attended church or synagogue in the previous week. That number was the highest percentage since the 1950s. But by Nov. 8-11, 42 percent said they had attended worship in the previous week, comparable to the 41 percent who said they had done so when surveyed May 10-14.

The Barna Research Group reported that 48 percent of adults surveyed in late October and early November said they had attended a church service in the past week compared to 42 percent polled between late July and mid-August.

"While current levels of adult attendance are higher than before the attack, they are not statistically different than the numbers recorded last November, thus reflecting the usual seasonal increase," the Ventura, Calif.-based research group reported.

Although church attendance increased after the Sept. 11 attacks, researchers found that six other measures of religious behavior, such as Bible reading, were identical

in the summer and fall.

The survey also found that statistics before and after the attacks concerning those who have made a "personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today" were identical, at 68 percent.

George Barna, president of Barna Research Group, said in a statement that he believes churches failed to help post-attack newcomers deepen their faith.

"Our assessment is that churches succeeded at putting on a friendly face but failed at motivating the vast majority of spiritual explorers to connect with Christ in a more intimate or intense manner," he said. ■

United Methodists Offer Encouragement, *continued from page 6*

of the church and have expressed a willingness to attend one of the 36,000 United Methodist churches across the country.

A random telephone survey of 1,250 people was conducted in 100 churches in each of the denomination's five jurisdictions. First-time attendance figures were gathered for churches in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., San Antonio, Portland, Ore., Baltimore and Indianapolis.

According to the results, 14 percent people of those surveyed remembered the United Methodist Church's television spots, compared to 18 percent who remembered ads placed by the Mormons, who have a 22-year history with television advertising.

The survey shows an 8 percent increase in awareness of the United Methodist Church over 2000, Igniting Ministry officials said. Seventy-five percent of those sampled indicate a belief in what the television spots say. More than 35 percent report a favorable attitude toward the United Methodist Church.

Most religious groups reported an increase in attendance immediately after Sept. 11. Horswill-Johnston said that the 100 Igniting Ministry test churches in September had a 108 percent increase of first-time attendance over the previous year.

The full report from the media-tracking firm will be available on the Igniting Ministry Web site at ignitingministry.org by mid-December. ■

news briefs:

Group wants 'reform' for Women's Division

(UMNS) A group of evangelical United Methodist women is calling for a "process of Reform" for the Women's Division of the churchwide Board of Global Ministries, after the unit's directors passed a resolution in October against the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan.

The call by the 5,000-member RENEW Network (a Resourcing, Enabling Network for Evangelical Women) was backed by the executive committee of Good News, an unofficial evangelical caucus within the denomination, at its Nov. 1-2 meeting. The Rev. James Heidinger, Good News president, said that while the mission work by local units of United Methodist Women was appreciated by most pastors, concern continues over the "radical feminist, pro-abortion, virulently anti-American, anti-evangelical, pro-homosexual attitude exhibited by the Women's Division and its leadership in New York."

As reported by United Methodist News Service on Oct. 23, directors of the Women's Division, the UMW's administrative body, voted to urge President Bush to use diplomatic means, rather than the bombing of Afghanistan, to bring to justice those responsible for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to choose life over death (Deut. 30:19). We are also called to love our enemies and those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44)," the resolution said. "As United Methodist Women, we are challenged to commit ourselves through prayer, study and action to continue the search for peace with justice."

Native Americans want 'act of repentance'

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (UMNS) – The United Methodist Church's international Indian caucus is encouraging the denomination to perform an act of repentance for atrocities committed against Native Americans.

The Native American International Caucus (NAIC) wants the 2004 General Conference to hold a repentance and reconciliation service for the Sand Creek Massacre and other acts of violence against American Indians.

In 2000, United Methodists confessed to the sin of racism within the denomination and held an act of repentance ceremony, together with a call for reconciliation. Racism in the church's predecessor bodies drove some African Americans to leave in the 18th and 19th centuries and form their own denominations. The NAIC wants a similar act of repentance at the 2004 legislative meeting in Pittsburgh.

During its Nov. 29-30 meeting, the NAIC also called for a national day of prayer on Dec. 16 against the use of Native American names for mascots of athletic teams. ■

Left: The Rev. Raymond Dunton, founder of Wings of Freedom, a nondenominational Native American ministry, in Ignacio, Colo., addresses the annual meeting of the Native American International Caucus Nov. 30 in Albuquerque, N.M.



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New Year Begins, *continued from page 1*

center. Applications are available by calling (423) 928-2156 or visiting www.holstonyouth.com. Applications and letters of recommendation will be accepted after the Dec. 20 deadline, organizers said.

After registering 309 participants for its debut in January 2001, organizers of Divine Rhythm hope to double attendance this year. The three-day event features the Rev. Jacquelyn Weekly, pastor at Walnut Creek UMC in California, with music and worship led by Wayne Kerr of Houston.

New this year at the conference's young adult retreat is Café Rhythm, a coffee-house style gathering with music, discussion groups, open mike/karaoke, and – of course – coffee. Participants are also encouraged to take advantage of free childcare (provided by the conference Children's Ministry Team) and participate in a Medic blood drive. Register by visiting www.divinerhythm.com or call (423) 928-2156. The fee for the entire weekend (not including meals and lodging) is \$25 per person.

Finally, families, laity and clergy are invited to attend Transformation

for a spring weekend designed to "inspire and equip church leadership for the 21st century." Returning this year is the Rev. Stephen Ayers and his staff from Hillvue Heights Church of Bowling Green, Ky., as worship and workshop leaders. Last year's event attracted 500 participants of all ages.

For more information, contact Conference Lay Leader Bob Lockaby at rlockaby@gplt.com, (423) 756-5171 or (423) 344-7361; or Bob Everhart, Transformation Design Team, at butrffy@3wave.com, (423) 764-7670 or (423) 652-2331. ■