

United Methodist Reporter folds

by [John Dart](#) in the [June 12, 2013](#) issue

The *United Methodist Reporter*, a national weekly newspaper that once produced nearly 300 separate editions, each with regional church news, said that the financial losses of recent months were part of an irreversible trend. Its final 45 editions, dated June 7, were scheduled to be mailed out May 31.

The financial crisis of 2008 had a “significant impact,” as “a growing number of churches and conferences either ceased publishing *Reporter* editions or changed their publishing frequency,” said Tom Palmer, chair of UMR Communications.

Editors in print journalism are well aware of growing reader preferences for online communications. “Still, when a venerable, deeply trusted news source like UMR is lost, religious journalists and people of faith throughout the country are the poorer,” said Jerry L. Van Marter, director of Presbyterian News Service and former president of Associated Church Press.

David Heim, executive editor of the *Century*, lamented the “fall of a once giant oak—the *United Methodist Reporter* was a massive presence not so long ago.” The newspaper had its origins in pre-Civil War Methodist papers in Texas.

United Methodist Communications and its news service “provide excellent online coverage of church activities and issues without any intermediate limitations or screening,” said Tom McAnally, a former director of the news service. Over the years the newspaper and the news service cooperated on Methodist reporting, but at times they competed to produce the best accounts, he said.

“I recall the late Spurgeon Dunnam, the UMR’s editor/publisher, who was a colorful guy and a journalistic gadfly,” McAnally said. “He asked the hard questions and held church leaders accountable.”

Closing the newspaper cost the jobs of 26 remaining employees; 13 others were laid off near the end of 2012. The loss of a major contract for printing, warehousing and shipping materials reduced revenue by about 40 percent, according to the UMR Communications news release. The newspaper had no strong donor base and no

direct support from the denomination.