

Giving in Tough Times

A study by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability found that 72 percent of surveyed ministries met, exceeded or came near their fourth-quarter contribution goals.

✖ **Feb. 24, 2009** – Despite the economic recession, ministry giving was higher than expected, according to a recent survey by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA).

In a survey of 300 member ministries, the ECFA found that 72 percent met, exceeded or came within 10 percent of their fourth-quarter contribution goals. More than a quarter -28 percent – were more than 10 percent below their goals.

“Many of the parachurch ministries we surveyed reported small donations [those between \$10 to \$100] were relatively unaffected, and in some cases, donations in this category increased,” said Dan Busby, acting president of ECFA. “In fact, some of our members had the strongest fourth quarter they’ve had in years and ended the year debt-free.”

Founded in 1979, the ECFA provides accreditation to Christian nonprofit organizations that comply with their standards for financial accountability, fund-raising and board governance.

The organization said some member ministries attributed the survey results to increased prayer and greater interest in supporting organizations that help the poor and disadvantaged.

More than half of member organizations said they increased one-on-one contact with key donors to buffer fund-raising during the economic downturn. More than 30 percent said they changed their message to donors about how the ministry was responding to a changing economy.

Despite the good news, half of those surveyed reported that their investments had lost 15 percent to 30 percent of their value. And many ministry leaders are concerned about how the recession will affect 2009 giving.

Most ministries are reducing costs, 41 percent have frozen or delayed salary increases, and 38 percent have frozen or reduced hiring.

Conference travel and capital projects have largely been reduced or delayed. Roughly 20 percent are sharing resources with other organizations and businesses.

“Most ECFA member ministries expect 2009 to be more challenging, primarily because major donors who made gifts in 2008 have expressed they may not be able to renew their financial commitments because of the economy,” Busby said. “But for leadership and staff members, this is ministry, not a job. Despite challenges, most remain committed to making positive operational and structural decisions, including developing contingency plans, which will enable them to continue to carry out God’s purpose despite limited resources.”