Tough Economy Hits Churches Hard

A survey released Monday found that the country's dire economic situation is now negatively impacting houses of worship and nonprofits across the nation.

[] According to the latest Barna Research survey the world’s current economic woes have taken a major toll on churches and nonprofits.
The Barna survey took a random sampling of more than 1,200 adult respondents across the country, one of every five households has decreased its giving to churches or religious organizations in recent months. Nonprofits have been hit the hardest, with almost one-third of all adults (31 percent) donating less to such groups. Among individuals cutting back on their giving, almost one in five reduced it by as much as 20 percent. Seventeen percent slashed their giving in half, while 11 percent decreased what they gave away by more than half. The study showed that 22 percent have stopped giving altogether.

Not surprisingly, those hit hardest by the economic downturn—and subsequently giving less to churches—are households making less than $20,000, as well as the 43 percent of families struggling with “serious financial debt.”

Among those surveyed who attend church, more than one-third said their church had specifically addressed the economic turmoil. A larger percentage of churches (39 percent among Protestant churches) had offered financial counseling to those struggling, while about half (52 percent) had created opportunities for congregants to receive such material assistance as food or clothing.

“Most nonprofits and churches count on the fourth quarter of the year to produce at least one-third of their annual income,” said researcher George Barna. “[But] the giving patterns we're witnessing suggest that churches, alone, will receive some $3 billion to $5 billion dollars less than expected during this fourth quarter.”

“The average church can expect to see its revenues dip about 4 to 6 percent lower than would have been expected without the economic turmoil. We anticipate that other nonprofit organizations will be hit even harder,” he concluded.