

Amid Global Recession, Giving to Evangelical Nonprofits Up

The worldwide economic downturn is still with us. It has hampered generosity, as many givers have found themselves likewise facing hardship: pay cuts, job loss, an underwater mortgage, a dwindling portfolio as the years tick down toward retirement.

Headlines during this “Great Recession” declare that more than 20 percent of Americans have experienced their household income plummet by at least a quarter. A report from one professor at Yale University stated that the median drop of middle-class income in 2009 was more than 46 percent. The *New York Times* reports that nationwide, millions of children—many from families that not long ago were middle class—have become first-time recipients of free or reduced-cost school meals.

This level of need may not have been witnessed in America since the Great Depression. But as needs rise for the services of nonprofits, many big charities are experiencing difficulty raising money. Giving to nonprofits fell 11 percent in 2009 and hasn’t recovered, reports the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

While giving in the world is down, amid the woe is wonderful news: Donations to evangelical Christian charities rose by almost 6 percent in 2010. The second Annual State of Giving Report by ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability) showed that in 2010 contributions to ECFA-member organizations with more than \$10 million in annual revenue increased by 6.7 percent. And some giving soared. Compared with 2009, cash donations to child sponsorship gained 24 percent, orphan care 20 percent and adoption 15 percent.

Evangelicals aren’t immune to unemployment, rising healthcare costs and shrinking 401(k)s. But it’s not hard to understand

why amid an overall dismal economic outlook, evangelicals continue to trust God and give to churches and parachurch ministries.

The early church described in the book of Acts likewise was struggling amid times of persecution. But in Acts 11, the Holy Spirit revealed to the church in Antioch that a great famine was coming to the entire Roman world. The disciples there opted to send relief to the church in Judea.

Antioch's Christians were themselves subject to the worldwide crisis. But they refused to hoard for themselves. They chose to bless others in need and trusted God to provide.

In Galatians 2, the leaders of the early church stressed to Paul the importance of continuing to remember the poor, which Paul described as "the very thing I had been eager to do all along."

Today, that same Spirit is moving Christians to give even when grim economic forecasts seem to dictate the opposite response. This testament to the sacrificial generosity and faithfulness of God's people is a witness to the world.

We must continue to give, even when times are hard. Christmas is a season of sharing, our last opportunity to finish the year well. Let's end 2011 strong with generous gifts to churches and charities that are doing the work of Christ in a hurting world.