

Churches and Christian Nonprofits May Need to Tighten Their Budgets; Here's the Sad Reason Why

Even though giving and generosity are cornerstones of Christian doctrine, one out of every five evangelical Protestant adults in the U.S. did not give a penny to either church or charity in the last 12 months, and half are estimated to have given away less than 1% of their income.

These findings come from the new report, "The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving," from Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts. The study, which included over 1,000 American evangelical Protestants, examines how and where evangelicals give money. The study also reveals significant age differences in giving, and points to some long-term concerns for donor-supported organizations.

In the 12 months preceding the study, 74% gave to a church while 58% gave to charity. A total of 51% of evangelicals gave money to both a local church and one or more charities or ministries outside of church. Nineteen percent did not financially support either church or charity.

The study also examines evangelical generosity, defined as the total amount of money given as a proportion of household income. Evangelicals who gave to a church averaged 3.2% of household income being used for that giving, while those who gave to charity outside of church averaged 1.4% of household income being used for that purpose.

However, when all evangelical Protestants are considered (including those who didn't give at all), the averages fall quite a bit: 2.4% of household income goes to church support

and 0.8% goes to charities or ministries outside of their church. That's a total of 3.2% of the typical evangelical's household income being given away to donor-supported organizations.

Beyond simple percentages and dollar amounts, the study uncovers two critical differences in giving patterns.

One of these is that almost every giving measure—generosity percentages, proportion of evangelicals who give, amounts of money given and so forth—varies dramatically according to the level of engagement evangelicals have with their faith. “There are enormous differences in giving according to how frequently evangelicals read the Bible, attend worship services and participate in a small group,” says Mark Dreistadt, Infinity Concepts founder and president. “Just as one example, generosity levels are nearly 600% higher among daily Bible readers than among evangelicals who rarely or never read the Bible.”

Dreistadt notes that survey research cannot prove causality, but the connection between faith engagement and generosity is undeniable. “We cannot prove through a survey that participating in a small group or reading the Bible more often will result in higher generosity. But the correlation is so clear, strong, and consistent that it lends considerable credence to the position that people are changed in demonstrable ways when they take their faith seriously. One of those ways appears to be their generosity.”

The second critical finding is that younger and older evangelicals are very different in their giving. As age increases, all measures of giving behavior increase. For example, 47% of evangelicals under age 40 gave to charity (excluding church) in the past year, compared to 69% of those 70 and older. The median dollar amount the oldest group gives away is almost double that of the youngest group. Total generosity is 5.1% among the oldest group, falling to 2.7%

among the youngest group.

None of the age differences will be surprising to experienced fundraisers; for many years younger people have tended to give less, with giving increasing as they age. However, the study points out warning signs that this traditional change may not happen in the same manner for today's younger generation.

"Two factors may heavily influence this," says Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research & Consulting. "One is the rise of the gig economy, which tends to bring more economic uncertainty to people who aren't always sure where and when their next income will come from. This, in turn, can affect giving. The second is that, as our study points out, younger people are far more involved than older people in direct giving, or person-to-person giving."

Sellers points to statistics in the report showing younger people are much more likely than older people to give money through financially helping a friend or family member, helping an individual stranger in need, or crowdfunding. "So the question is, if younger people do increase their giving as they age, as has traditionally been the case, will they also turn towards formal ministries and charities? Or will they just increase their direct giving?" Sellers asks.

To request a copy of the full report, please contact:

- Darrell Law, Infinity Concepts vice president and chief growth officer at darrell@ or 724-930-2801. Or
- Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research at ron@ or 602-684-6294.

Definition of "Evangelical Protestant"

This study uses the definition of "evangelical" favored by the National Association of Evangelicals. Respondents who agreed strongly with four statements about their spiritual beliefs (The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe, It is

important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin, and Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation), and who were not aligned with a non-Protestant faith group (Catholic, Orthodox, Mormon) were included in the study. {eoa}

Grey Matter Research is a marketing research and consumer insights company with extensive experience serving both the charitable and religious sectors. The company conducts consumer insights work that helps organizations make wiser, more informed decisions based on knowledge rather than assumptions.

Infinity Concepts is a brand communication agency that inspires people of faith to action through consulting, branding, fundraising, public relations, creative, traditional media and digital media. With almost 20 years of experience, Infinity Concepts specializes in reaching and engaging the Christian audience.

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