

Giving to Religious Organizations Still Declining

In discouraging news for church leaders, giving to religious organizations is still down.

Giving USA's 57th annual report shows signs of a slow recovery in charitable giving overall in America but not in giving to religious organizations.

In 2011, overall giving increased 4 percent, but giving to religion fell 1.7 percent.

"This is an unprecedented trend and a troubling sign as this is the second year in a row that giving to religious organizations has declined," says Rick Dunham, president and CEO of Dunham+Company and a member of the editorial board of Giving USA.

Religious giving fell from 2009 to 2010 by 2 percent. There has been a 3.7 percent drop in support for religion from 2009 to 2011.

Giving to religion is the only sector of charitable giving that has seen a cumulative two-year decline in giving, according to Giving USA. All other sectors such as giving to education, human services, international affairs, environment/animals, public-society benefit and health have grown.

The religious sector as reported in Giving USA includes houses of worship, the organizing or national offices of denominations and faith groups, ministries and religious communities. This sector has consistently been the largest recipient of charitable dollars. This year, it retains that honor, but the share has dropped from 35 percent in 2010 to 32 percent in 2011.

Other research has shown a decline in giving to mainline and other Protestant denominations.

“Many churches and Christian ministries have struggled since the beginning of the Great Recession, especially smaller churches and ministries,” says Dunham. “The Giving USA report doesn’t provide a lot of hope that things will turn around anytime soon. Our advice to the ministries we serve is to continue to appeal to the deeper values and purposes that motivate people of faith to give, and to do so consistently.”