

Though it's Haunting America, This is Having Little Effect on Churches

Megachurches across the country are holding their own during uncertain economic times, a new survey shows.

Most megachurches continue to see attendance and giving rise, and the bigger the church is, the more likely it is to experience increases, Leadership Network reported in its *2010 Large Church Economic Outlook Report*.

According to the *Christian Post*, survey results indicate that the economic downturn is having little impact on America's larger churches. A full 100 percent of churches with 8,000 or more attendees experienced growth in attendance and giving from 2009 to 2010. And all surveyed churches with attendance of 10,000 to 14,999 plan to reach this year's budget projections.

Overall, 81 percent of megachurches' congregations with attendance of 2,000 or more saw more attendees and only 9 percent reported lower attendance. Sixty-seven percent of megachurches increased their budget, with the average increase being 3 percent, and the same proportion said they expect to meet their 2010 budget.

Most church leaders anticipate that their congregations will finish 2010 in the black financially, according to the report.

While 71 percent said in an April-May survey that they believe the economy is having "no impact" or a "slightly negative" impact on the church and its ministries, only 58 percent said the same in the October survey.

Sixty-four percent of megachurches gave church staff an

increase in salary from 2009 to 2010, but the majority of the pay increases were only 1 percent to 3 percent. Only 4 percent of megachurches cut salaries in 2010. The rest kept salaries the same.

Some of the ways megachurches have been adjusting to the downturn include employing more volunteers, increasing emphasis on financial training classes and creating more financial cushion in the church bank account.

Notably, about one third of megachurches have shifted more of their budget toward external ministry.

For 2010, 34 percent chose “church-wide financial emphasis designed to help the poor or needy” as their top priority. Thirty-one percent said a capital funds drive for new property or building was a priority.

David Fletcher, executive pastor of The Chapel of Akron in Ohio, said the recession has actually had a positive impact on churches reports the *Post*.

“The recession is helping us focus on what we really need and want to do,” he said, as quoted in the report. “This is not a time for superfluous programs or overweight expenses. God is using the recession to help us hone what we do and why. It is a great opportunity.”

The report is based on findings from a survey of 253 large churches. It is the second in a three-part series examining the impact of the recession on America’s larger churches.

The first report was released in September and details the salaries of church staff and church budgets. The third report will be released in December.