

Shaky Financial Future: Younger Christians Show Decline in Local Church Support

Data for the study was gathered online through a survey of 2,016 U.S. adults, conducted from Nov. 12–19, 2021. An additional online survey of 516 U.S. Protestant senior pastors was also conducted from March 25–April 5, 2022.

The study shows that while millennials and Gen Z adults are great when it comes to giving their time to churches, some 51% of pastors say they're "very concerned" about them not financially supporting the church, while another 43% are "somewhat concerned."

"The fact is financial giving is a driving force of a church's efforts," the study says.

Pastors' concerns may stem from a pragmatic reality: The future of the church depends in large part on generosity. And that generosity will soon hinge on a generation who presently exhibit less financial security and lower levels of Christian affiliation, church attendance and charitable giving than their elders," Barna researchers noted.

"A proactive response might start with building on a shared conviction among pastors and young parishioners: that churches have a responsibility to guide the next generation into a life of greater generosity."

While they are worried about the financial giving of younger adults, some 57% of pastors surveyed for the study said they're "not concerned" about the giving of older generations. One in three, or 34% of pastors reported that older

congregants at their church are “extremely” effective in showing their generosity, while only 5% said the same about their younger congregants. A majority, 56%, of pastors described their younger congregants as only “somewhat” effective when it comes to being generous.

In a 2022 study called “The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences,” which was based on input from more than 1,000 American Evangelical Protestants, researchers found that when it comes to giving, younger donors have a more “global mindset” and a broader range of causes they want to support with their dollars.

“While there are many differences among younger evangelical donors, what stands out even more is how different younger donors are from older donors,” researchers wrote in the report.

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“Younger donors are far less given to focusing on their local area or even domestic work in general. At least regarding charitable giving among evangelicals, it appears to be true that the younger generations have a much more global mindset than their parents or grandparents,” researchers added. “This spells significant opportunity for international organizations, but also potential long-term concern for local/domestic charities.”

Mark Dreistadt, the founder and president of Infinity Concepts, painted younger evangelical donors as far different from other generations.

“Younger donors have a much more international focus,” he said. “They seek variety in their giving. They’re less trusting but do less planning or research. Unlike older donors, younger donors are a mix of perspectives rather than a

strong common voice. Not only that, but they feel less strongly about their perspectives than do older donors.”

Grey Matter Research President Ron Sellers said many ministries and charities looking to survive in the current donor climate might need to provide more diversity in their programming.

“What leaders need to realize is that they can’t effectively reach the 35-year-old donor with the same strategy they used to reach their 65-year-old donors,” Sellers said. “Organizations may need to provide more variety in programs and messaging to retain these donors.”

The challenges facing churches with the younger generation’s financial support are clear. While these younger adults are generous with their time and have a global mindset in their giving, they are not contributing to their local churches as much as older generations.

This shift in giving patterns raises concerns about the future financial stability of churches. As churches adapt to this changing landscape, it becomes crucial to find innovative ways to engage younger generations in supporting their local communities of faith. {eo}

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