

Religious charities gain in a recession year: A Giving USA Foundation study

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Religious organizations reported a 5.5 percent increase in donations last year, a marked contrast from the nationwide 2 percent decline in charitable giving, according to a study by the Giving USA Foundation.

Religious congregations and other religious organizations, which received 35 percent of the total \$307 billion in charitable contributions, exceeded \$100 billion in donations for the second year in a row.

Though public-society benefit and international affairs organizations also cited increases in charitable contributions, two-thirds of public charities reported a decrease. An overall decrease in giving has happened only one other time in the report's 54-year history.

The economic recession spurred the decline, said Del Martin, the chair of the foundation. "We definitely did see belt-tightening . . . but it could have been a lot worse." Even with the cutbacks, this was the second consecutive year in which the total exceeded \$300 billion.

The survey showed that 54 percent of human-services charities saw an increase in need for their assistance in 2008, and 60 percent were forced to cut expenses. Organizations serving youth were hit the hardest, with 74 percent reporting funding shortages.

The majority of donations came from individual contributors, who gave more than \$229 billion. Half of all gifts by individuals went to religious organizations. Corporate donations totaled \$14 billion, a 4.5 percent decrease from the year before. -*Religion News Service*