



Megachurches' income took hit in '09

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The recession hit many churches hard last year, while others were able to not only survive but thrive, according to a report by Maximum Generosity and Christianity Today International.

The March survey of 1,017 churches showed that almost 40 percent of congregations saw a decline in giving during 2009, up from 29 percent one year ago. Almost as many, 35 percent, experienced an increase in giving last year, but that number was down from 47 percent in 2008.

The report states that megachurches, those with regular attendance of more than 2,000 worshippers, were particularly hard hit. According to the statistics, 47 percent of megachurches saw a decrease in giving, compared to 23 percent the previous year.

One Arkansas megachurch, First Baptist Church in Springdale, defied the trend, posting an increase in giving for the calendar year.

Ben Mayes, executive leader of finance for the church, said giving was down for the fiscal year of Oct. 1, 2008, through Sept. 30, 2009, by about 2.8 percent. But by the end of 2009 giving was up by 6.8 percent. Giving in December was particularly high, up almost 18 percent.

"On calendar years, when we look at them, we've not decreased over the last eight or nine years," Mayes said.

Percentage of churches in 2009 experiencing a decline in giving



SOURCE: stateoftheplate.info

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Based on the decline in giving in the fiscal year, the church did reduce this year's budget by 3 percent.

"Even before that, when the economy started going down we started making budget reductions," Mayes said. "We implemented an energy-saving program and that saved us quite a bit of money, and with attrition we didn't fill

some positions. We were able to reduce without a lot of pain and notice."

The church did freeze salaries for this year and Mayes said they haven't decided on raises for the next fiscal year. So far, giving has been up by about 10 percent in 2010.

"It's been a phenomenal year so far," Mayes said. "The recession has redefined 'normal' and caused people to be more focused on others ... when we talk about touching lives and changing lives our people are amazing."

Another Arkansas megachurch, First Assembly of God in North Little Rock, also saw no decrease in giving last year. Pastor Rod Loy said the church experienced a slight increase in monetary donations and so far this year is on track for the same amount. The church kept a flat budget for this year in anticipation of challenges.

"What we have seen is a deterioration in large gifts," Loy said. "The bigger givers have less to give but that's been offset by everybody giving. And, we've seen an increase in the number of people giving."

Loy said hard economic times spur people to evaluate what's important in their lives and many find the church to be essential.

"People recognize they really need God's help with their finances and going it alone is a bad choice anytime and it's a really bad choice in tough times," he said.

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