

Poll: N.Y. may be more spiritual, but not because of 9/11

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(RNS) New York-area residents are more spiritually active since 9/11, a new survey shows, but the uptick in faith may be a matter of coincidence rather than a religious response to the terrorist attacks.

The Barna Group found that 46 percent of people living in or near New York City reported attending worship services in the previous week in 2010, up from 31 percent in 2000. However, the upward trend didn't kick in until after 2004, said David Kinnaman, Barna's president.

"The research suggests that faith and religion took on new urgency for many New Yorkers after 9/11, but the impact was neither immediate nor long-lived," said Kinnaman. "While ... religion's importance did grow in the years after 9/11, church attendance and active faith measures did not really start increasing until after 2004."

Researchers found that more New Yorkers are spending time reading the Bible on their own, up from 29 percent in 1997-98 to 35 percent in 2009-10. Nationwide, personal Bible reading has remained essentially unchanged in the last decade.

The latest figures also show that 61 percent of New York-area residents agree strongly that religious faith is very important in their lives, compared to 72 percent of U.S. adults.

Kinnaman said there could be numerous reasons for the changes in religious activity, including the 9/11 attacks, the weakening economy and an influx of immigrants who are more religiously observant.

"Whatever the combination of causes, the residents of the New York City region are more spiritually active, more likely to be 'churched,'

and more committed to Christ than they were a decade ago," he said.

The findings are based on 3,406 interviews conducted in the New York City media market between 1997 and 2010.