

Religious giving rose 2 percent last year: \$88 billion to religious congregations

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Donations to religious congregations in the U.S. rose by nearly 2 percent last year, to an estimated \$88 billion, according to a new study.

The Giving USA Foundation annual report, released June 13, divides donations into ten categories, including the arts, international aid and education. The category called “religious organizations” outpaced them all in total giving, as it traditionally does.

“It reflects how important religion is to Americans,” said Richard Jolly, vice chair of Giving USA. Charitable contributions overall were at a record high last year, rising by 5 percent to an estimated \$248.5 billion.

Most donations for the victims of the year’s biggest disaster, the December 26 Asian tsunami, will be included with figures for 2005. In 2004, tsunami relief represented less than half of 1 percent of all contributions.

The Giving USA report includes contributions from foundations, corporations, individual donors and bequests. Individuals gave 76 percent of the total. The “religious organizations” category includes donations made to individual congregations, national offices of religious groups and religious media. Donations to faith-based groups that provide education, health care and other services are tallied with other sectors.

The Giving USA report is compiled annually by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. It is based on surveys of organizations, information from research institutions, tax data and government estimates of economic indicators. *-Religion News Service*