

# Report: Small churches feeling financial squeeze

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(RNS) Almost all U.S. churches witnessed a change in the financial giving they received in 2010 compared to 2009, with smaller churches feeling the squeeze but larger churches faring relatively better, according to a new report.

Only 12 percent of churches reported unchanged giving from 2009, according to the State of the Plate survey released Wednesday (March 30), while 43 percent of churches experienced a giving increase and 39 percent reported a decrease.

Smaller congregations were more likely to see a decrease in giving, said Matt Branaugh, an editor at Christianity Today International, which helped gather the data for the State of the Plate for the past two years.

"We do see smaller churches continuing to struggle, it seems more so than larger-sized churches," Branaugh said.

The report found that about 40 percent of churches with fewer than 249 attendees experienced a drop in giving. Only 29 percent of megachurches, with an average weekend attendance of more than 2,000, reported a decrease in giving, according to the report.

The percentage of churches that reported a drop in giving in 2010 rose slightly from 2009, from 38 percent to 39 percent. Churches that reported an increase in giving rose from 35 percent in 2009 to 43 percent in 2010.

The State of the Plate survey was launched in 2008 when Brian Kluth, founder of Colorado Springs, Colo.-based Maximum Generosity, realized there was minimal solid data on church finances.

The following year, Kluth's financial consulting firm recruited Christianity Today International in compiling the report. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability joined both organizations this year to analyze self-reported 2010 data from churches.

The survey is a constituency survey, based on email responses submitted by 1,507 congregations and is not a traditional random phone sample with a margin of error.

Almost all responding churches (91 percent) expressed concern over the potential of a government revision of the rules for charitable deductions. Kluth said the Obama administration's proposal to reduce tax deductions for high-end charitable donors will impact gifts given to churches.

"If the government's plan to change the rules on charitable tax deductions goes through, giving to charities and churches and the help they give to others will likely be negatively impacted at a time it is needed the most," Kluth said in a statement.