

Church & Faith Trends



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Evangelical Congregational Income During the First Four Months of 2009

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In 2009, phone interviews with 475 randomly selected pastors from five major denominations (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Convention Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, and Mennonite Brethren) were completed as part of the Canadian Evangelical Churches Study (CECS). Sam Reimer (Professor of Sociology, Crandall University), Michael Wilkinson (Associate Professor of Sociology, Trinity Western University) and Andrew Grenville (Chief Research Officer, Angus Reid Strategies) conducted this study, which was funded in its entirety by the Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism (CRCE). In addition, the study included 50 face-to-face interviews with pastors, 100 phone interviews with youth/children's pastors, and five informal interviews with denominational leaders. More findings from this study will be forthcoming in *Church & Faith Trends*.

One question posed to pastors was "During the first four months of 2009, did total giving to this church decrease, increase, or remain about the same as compared to the first four months of last year?" This matter is of particular interest because of the recession that began toward the end of 2008. Those pastors who reported an increase or decrease in giving were then asked, "By approximately what percentage did total giving increase/decrease?" Table 1 gives the total number of pastors who said their church giving decreased, increased, or remained the same (in the "total" column), along with the percentage of increase or decrease. For example, the second column shows that 25 churches claimed a decrease in giving that was between one and five percent, while three times as many churches (75) claimed a 1% to 5% increase.

Table 1. Numbers of churches reporting changed giving between the first four months of 2009 as compared to the first four months of 2008

Change	Percentage Change							Total
	1%–5%	6%–10%	11%–20%	21%–30%	31%–50%	>50%	DK	
Decreased	25	33	23	2	2	2	6	93 (20%)
Increased	75	36	28	11	1	1	11	163 (34%)
Stayed the same								203 (43%)
DK								15 (3 %)
Total								474 (100%)

Source: Canadian Evangelical Churches Study, 2009.

Note: DK = Don't know.

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Assuming that the recession would have an impact on giving in the first four months of 2009, there is little evidence that the churches experienced a downturn overall. Less than 20% stated that their congregation's giving had decreased during the first four months of 2009, while 34% said they had seen an increase, as compared to nearly 43% who said there was no change.

Of course, a change in attendance can contribute to changes in giving, so in table 2 we compare giving change with changes in total church attendance as reported by the pastor. For instance, the second column shows that 32 churches reported both a decline in attendance and in giving, accounting for 37% of churches with declining attendance.

Table 2. Church giving and attendance

		Attendance in First Four Months of 2009 (Compared to First Four Months of 2007) Number (Percentage of Attendance Category)			
		Decreased	Increased	Stayed the Same	Total
Giving in first four months of 2009 (Compared to the first four months of 2008)	Decreased	32 (37%)	26 (12 %)	35 (22 %)	93
	Increased	15 (17%)	99 (47 %)	49 (30%)	163
	Stayed the same	39 (45%)	87 (41%)	77 (48%)	203
	Total	86 (100%)	212 (100%)	161 (100%)	459

Source: Canadian Evangelical Churches Study, 2009.

Note: While the comparison interval for giving is one year and the comparison interval for attendance is two years, this difference is minor because the data are only being used to show a general trend.

There is a statistically significant relationship between attendance growth in churches and increased giving, in that those churches that are growing are more likely to show increased giving during the first four months of 2009.¹ However, even among those churches where attendance was steady compared to 2007, we see almost the same proportion of those that experience increased giving (30%) or decreased (22%) as in the sample overall. In fact, nearly two-thirds (17% + 45%) of congregations with decreasing attendance showed no decline in giving. We can conclude that increased attendance is not a sufficient explanation for the positive giving trends at the start of 2009.

¹Statistical relationship based on a chi-square test.

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We also looked at the effect of province on giving change, because the recession did not affect all regions equally. However, the province effect was not significant, indicating that one cannot conclude from these data that the recession negatively impacted Alberta churches more so than Maritime churches (or any other regional comparison). Finally, since churches involved in construction projects often seek to raise additional funds, we checked to see if this factor accounted for budgetary increases. However, those churches that had money going toward construction were not more (or less) likely to see increased giving.

Overall, then, there does not seem to be a decline in giving among the evangelical churches in the first four months of 2009. Instead, churches were most likely to report no difference in their levels of giving, followed by increased giving, and decreases were least common. 🍀