

A decade of FACT research: first report released today.

Quick Links...

[Our Website](#)

[Products](#)

[More About Us](#)



Join Our
Mailing List



New FACT survey finds 68 percent of U.S. congregations hit with financial difficulties due to recession

The economic slump extends and deepens a decade-long congregational decline

By Yonat Shimron

Holy Toll Report: The Impact of the Great Recession

The decade-long financial decline of U.S. congregations accelerated during the 2008 recession and may pose long-term challenges to some churches, synagogues and mosques already weakened by flagging membership, according to the new Faith Communities Today (FACT) report.

FACT 2010 is a national survey of 11,077 randomly sampled congregations. It found that 68 percent of congregations took a financial hit due to the recession, with nearly 20 percent taking a "big hit."

These figures exacerbate an ongoing decline in U.S. congregations that saw the percentage of congregations in some serious financial difficulty double to 20 percent in the last ten years.

"The downward trend was in place before the recession hit," said David Roozen, author of the report and chairman of the multi-faith coalition that sponsors the FACT surveys. "But the recession has contributed to extending the decline."

The latest FACT report includes the responses from 26 studies

conducted in 32 faith groups and Christian denominations. This is the fourth survey the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership has undertaken since 2000.

On the positive side, 10 percent of congregations reported they were recovering from the economic downturn as early as the spring of 2010. Among the strategies used by congregations to cope with the downturn, digging into savings and investments was the most common, followed by salary freezes or reductions in paid staff. Roozen estimates that these reductions equal about 500,000 lost jobs and salaries among clergy, lay professionals and support staff.

But the recession took its heaviest toll among members. Half of U.S. congregations were beset with requests for emergency assistance. One in four congregations were called upon to provide emergency housing.

"The longer term question is how many congregations got pushed into a really strong deficit situation that tends to create a cycle of decline," said Roozen. "Congregations can lose their capacity to deal with negative forces and that's the bigger worry."

[A copy of the report and related materials are available at the FACT web site.](#)

Yonat Shimron is a journalist who covers American religion.

Resources for Dealing with the Recession

A coalition of philanthropic organizations released a study at the end of March of the 2010 fund raising activities of charities across the country. It found that two-thirds of charities held their own or gained some ground last year. Many nonprofits stopped the bleeding, but donations did not rebound as much as predicted. [The report is available from the Foundation Center.](#)

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Policy has published a guide entitled [Funding Faith-based Services in a Time of Fiscal Pressure.](#)

Wayne Clark has developed a PowerPoint presentation and provides a collection of eight articles on [Giving in Tough Times](#) which has been shared with Unitarian Universalist Association affiliated groups and other faith traditions.

PEARL, a Jewish leadership development resource center, provides a guide for [How do we run a successful congregational fundraising event?](#)

Christian churches that follow the Lectionary can find weekly stewardship education materials in *The Stewardship Companion: Lectionary*

Resources for Preaching by David N. Mosser (Westminster John Knox, 2007).

A Muslim resource for dealing with the recession is geared more to families, but can also be used by groups: [How to Face Economic Recession as Muslims](#).

Additional Reports from the FACT 2010 Survey

The partnership is working hard on unpacking and analyzing the large amount of data from the 2010 survey and will publish reports as quickly as possible. We are committed to the following schedule.

May -- *Church Growth in the 21st Century*

June -- *Internet Technology in Congregations*

September -- *Key Trends in a Decade*

November -- *Change in Worship Dynamics*

If you want to get prompt announcements as each of these are released, make sure you are a subscriber to this newsletter. If you are a journalist or blogger and want advance information, contact the editor, Monte Sahlin at montessahlin@gmail.com or (301) 325-8095.

For further information about FACT, or to learn how to join the Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership (CCSP), contact David Roozen at roozen@hartsem.edu.