

Religious People More Likely to Give to Charity, Study Says

By Alex Daniels

Nearly two-thirds of people who claim a religious affiliation donate to charity, while 56% who aren't religious do so, according to a new study.

Giving is most common among those for whom faith is a regular part of their lives. Of those people in the study who claimed a religious affiliation, about 75% who said they frequently attend religious services gave to congregations, and 60% gave to charities either religious or secular in nature. By comparison, fewer than half who said they don't regularly attend faith services supported charities, according to the study, which was conducted by Jumpstart, a nonprofit research group, and researchers at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

"If your goal is to connect with donors, it's clear that one of the things that matters to them is their religious orientation," says Shawn Landres, Jumpstart's chief executive and a co-author of the report.

Broad Definition

The study also attempted to show the reach of religion by looking at how much money went not only to congregations but also to charities that pursue a secular mission but have some elements of faith in their programs.

The researchers asked donors to characterize how much of their 2012 giving went to each of three types of nonprofits: religious congregations, organizations with a religious identity, and non-religious charities. The results, Mr. Landres says, show that contributions to some organizations, like Catholic Charities, are often considered religious gifts in donors' eyes even though the groups may serve people of any faith and have a main purpose that doesn't involve religion.

Based on this standard, the study found that religious giving is sweeping: The results indicate that 41% of all charitable gifts from households last year went to congregations; 32% went to other nonprofits with a religious identity; and 27% went to secular charities.

"There's a perception that religion is restricted to the congregation," Mr. Landres says. "People assume wrongly that religion is not happening in other places."

Some philanthropy experts are skeptical that religious giving is so broad. Paul Schervish, director of Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy, questioned whether the study's methodology was rigorous enough to give an accurate national picture of religious giving.

He says it takes more work to understand what motivates a donor. "What about the Jewish guy who gives to Massachusetts General Hospital because his mother was treated there? Is that a religious gift?" he asks.

Similar Giving Rates

The study of more than 4,800 American households, covering members of five major religious denominations and people who are unaffiliated with any faith, was derived from two national surveys on giving compiled this year: the National Study of American Religious Giving and the National Study of American Jewish Giving.

Among the findings:

- Giving rates among black Protestants, evangelical Protestants, Jews, mainline Protestants—which include Episcopalians, members of the United Methodist Church, Presbyterians, and some Lutherans—and Roman Catholics were about the same. However, while roughly half of all members of the other faith groups contribute to religious congregations, only 37% of Jews did the same.
- American households donated a median \$375 to congregations, \$150 to religiously identified nonprofits, and \$250 to secular charities in 2012.
- Black Protestants, followed by Roman Catholics and Jews, were the most likely to give out of the desire to help the needy.
- The three most popular charitable causes for all households regardless of religious affiliation were, in descending order: basic social services, "combined purpose" organizations (like United Way), and health care.

The report can be found at: connectedtogive.org