

A Special Report

faith &
PHILANTHROPY

The Connection Between Charitable
Behavior and Giving to Religion

giving &
VOLUNTEERING
IN THE UNITED STATES



INDEPENDENT
SECTOR

About INDEPENDENT SECTOR

INDEPENDENT SECTOR is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of more than 700 national organizations, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs, collectively representing tens of thousands of charitable groups in every state across the nation. Its mission is to promote, strengthen, and advance the nonprofit and philanthropic community to foster private initiative for the public good.

Research Program

INDEPENDENT SECTOR's Research Program works to build the research necessary to accurately define, chart, and understand the nonprofit sector and ways it can be of greatest service to society. Signature projects include the *Nonprofit Almanac*, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, and the Measures Project.

The *Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001* Series

An executive summary, comprehensive report, and series of smaller reports exploring special topics from the *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* national survey will be available throughout 2002. Orders can be placed by calling the INDEPENDENT SECTOR Publications Center at 888-860-8118 or by visiting the INDEPENDENT SECTOR website at www.IndependentSector.org.

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Foreword

Robert W. Edgar, General Secretary, National Council of Churches;
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In his 1831 reflections on democracy in America, Alexis de Tocqueville said, in effect, that America is great because she is good. If ever she ceases to be good, she will cease to be great. We can reasonably assume from the context of this quotation that Tocqueville is utilizing moral language to describe the quality of motivation and generosity he had observed in his exposure to the civic and voluntary life of early America.

This INDEPENDENT SECTOR report picks up on Tocqueville's long-neglected theme. Like Tocqueville at his best, this study holds up a mirror to the landscape of American philanthropy and reflects back to us a picture that shows a bold and

persistent link between patterns of giving to religious institutions and to the broader society.

Most pastors, priests, rabbis, imams, and other religious leaders will not be surprised to learn that those who contribute their time and financial resources to religious institutions are more likely to contribute to broad civic purposes as well. Religious leaders carefully cultivate the habit of sharing resources as an article of faithful witness and a matter of responsible living within civic society. The findings of this study offer evidence that such lessons are instructive to congregants in heretofore-unrecognized proportions. The finding that those who give to religious organizations are both more likely to give to secular organizations and to give more generously of both time and money should and will have important consequences for many aspects of our society.

In a moment in which “faith-based initiatives” are being debated as one means to provide services to needy populations, this report offers hard evidence of the religious community’s philosophic and material capacity for generosity and civic engagement.

Leaders of religious congregations will find this report not only satisfying but also an inducement to continue with their practices of cultivating generosity and involvement among their congregants. Real contributions to the well-being of our communities, the preservation of

our natural resources, and the very culture and people of our land are the beneficiaries of this great giving of resources.

As a seminary president I often sought contributions from for-profit corporations. Corporations may find in this study the evidence of broad community giving, which is often foundational to their own contributions. This study offers corporate philanthropy an opportunity to observe the scope and scale of such contributions in a broader context.

As General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, I am often asked by large benevolent organizations how they might gain better access to the vast infrastructure of American churches, especially to enlist the voluntary services of believers to aid the hungry and the homeless, the young and the elderly. In the light of the findings of *Faith and Philanthropy*, we should all redouble our efforts knowing that the resources are great and the intentions good among congregational participants to be wise stewards of their resources of time and money to serve the greater common good.

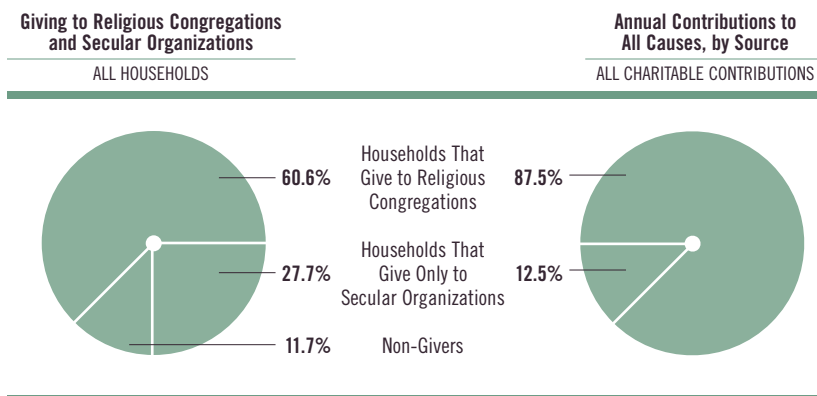
The goodness, which Tocqueville once linked to greatness, is in no short supply in today’s America, and INDEPENDENT SECTOR has enabled all of us to better understand how and where we might locate and direct it for purposes benevolent to all.

Overview

Americans who give to or volunteer with religious congregations give more time and money than those only involved in secular charitable activities. The power of faith-based giving and volunteering is clear, compelling, and measurable:

The beliefs, values, attitudes, and commitments of those who contribute to religion translate into high levels of generosity to other causes as well. Undoubtedly, there are a number of other factors that influence levels of giving, including income and home ownership, but religious belief is without question one of the most important factors independent of economic status.

Figure 1 Faith and Philanthropy



Givers to churches, temples, and mosques—about 60 percent of all households—support not only their places of worship, but also act on their values by supporting other secular causes. Of givers to religious congregations, over 85 percent also support secular organizations, providing three-quarters of the philanthropic support those other organizations receive. Overall, religion-giving households give 87.5 percent of all charitable contributions, averaging over \$2,100 in annual contributions to all causes (Figure 1).

Givers to religious congregations are dramatically more generous than others. Those who give to both congregations and secular organizations give nearly four times as much as those who only give to secular charities. Further, givers to religion are just as generous to other types of nonprofit organizations as

are secular givers. Clearly, giving to religion does not detract from the support these other organizations receive.

The influence of faith extends to volunteering. People who regularly attend religious services are much more likely to be volunteers. Fifty-four percent of those who regularly attend religious services volunteer, while only 32 percent of the non-attendees volunteer. Further, frequent attendees, 29 percent of all people, account for nearly 70 percent of the hours volunteered each month. In round numbers, one-third of the people give two-thirds of the time. It is evident that faith has a remarkable impact on volunteering.



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