

## National Church Leaders Response Form

### HIGHLIGHTS

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- A National Church Leaders Response Form was sent to leaders in 202 historically Christian communions in the United States.
- The Response Form proposed a potential “positive agenda for affluence” in the statement, “Church members in the United States should increase giving through their churches in an effort to stop the millions of annual preventable global child deaths in Jesus’ name.”
- Responses, some with comments, were received from 81 denominations, or 41% of those successfully contacted. Of those responding, 66, or 81%, said yes; four, or 6%, said no; and 11, or 14%, did not choose either option.
- In several communions, more than one leader received the Response Form. When the Responses were analyzed in terms of the 105 individuals who responded, 79% said yes, 5% said no, and 16% chose neither option.

### NARRATIVE

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A National Church Leaders Response Form was sent to representatives in 202 historically Christian communions. As the cover letter stated, much attention is focused on issues that separate the various traditions within what might be termed the historically Christian church.<sup>1</sup> The intent of the National Church Leaders Response Form was to propose a “positive agenda for affluence” and provide the opportunity for the leaders from a wide theological spectrum to indicate whether they agreed with the statement or not.

The statement read, “Church members in the United States should increase giving

<sup>1</sup> See the “Terms” section in the Introduction to this volume for a brief discussion of this category.

through their churches in an effort to stop the millions of annual preventable global child deaths in Jesus' name." The Response Form offered the option of checking "Yes" or "No" and provided a space for comments. The Methodology section at the end of this chapter details the procedure followed in the mailings.

The responses can be analyzed in terms of the number of denominations responding, and the number of individuals responding.

**DENOMINATIONAL RESPONSES.** Of the 202 communions contacted, the original address for four proved to be undeliverable, and no alternative could be found. Therefore, the maximum number of responses possible was 198.

Leaders in 81 denominations returned the form.<sup>2</sup> Those responses represented 41% of the denominations successfully contacted. In three cases, more than one person from the same denomination responded. For the denominational response analysis, the answers were combined. In two cases, both leaders responded Yes. In the third case, one leader responded "Yes" and one leader responded "No." That denomination was counted as a "Neither" response.

A total of 66 communions, or 81% of those responding, chose Yes on the Response Form.

Leaders from four denominations chose No.

Leaders in 10 denominations responded without choosing either Yes or No, and were counted as a "Neither" response.

**INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES.** A total of 453 national leaders received one of the mailings of the National Church Leaders Response Form. Of those, nine proved to be undeliverable, resulting in a total possible response from 444 leaders.

Of those, 105, or 24%, returned the Response Form. Several of those who responded included comments to elaborate on their choice.

Of those individuals responding, 83, or 79%, chose Yes to affirm the statement.

Five respondents checked "No."

In addition, 17 respondents chose neither option, and for purposes of this analysis were classified as "Neither."

**A Clarification on the Statement's Intent.** Three of the "Yes" responses were qualified by reservations about the wording of the statement. The misgiving in all three responses related to the placement of the phrase, "in Jesus' name." The concern was that the statement could be read to imply that the deaths of children occurred in relationship to Jesus' name. No such implication was originally intended, and the statement would be misunderstood were a reader to infer that such a relationship was indicated. Since national leaders who did not respond to the first mailing were to be sent additional copies

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<sup>2</sup>Although the bishops in the Catholic Church in the U.S.A. each received a Response Form, and 19 of them responded, this communion was not included in the number of denominations because neither the President or the Vice President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops responded. However, the responses of the bishops were included in the analysis of individual responses.

of the same mailing, the wording on the Response Form could not be changed and still be consistent with the earlier mailings. However, in order to address this grammatical sensitivity, and to provide a common ground for discussion on the broader issues involved, a clarification is in order. Throughout the following pages, an accurate reading of the statement’s original *intent* would be that, in Jesus’ name, church members in the United States should increase giving through their churches in an effort to stop the millions of annual preventable global child deaths.

**A Broad Spectrum of Response.** The 202 communions whose national leaders received the mailing spanned the theological spectrum. By self-description, the denominations included African-American, Anabaptist, Baptist, Evangelical, Fundamental, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic other than Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup> Positive responses were received from respondents within each of these categories.

The five negative responses came from three traditions, including Anabaptist, Baptist, and Evangelical.

Those that chose neither Yes or No were from communion categories including African American, Anabaptist, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic. Table 20 summarizes these responses.

*BACKGROUND ON “A POSITIVE AGENDA FOR AFFLUENCE.”* In March 1995, the empty

**Table 20: National Church Leaders Response Form, Individual Responses by Denominational Category**

Response	African American	Anabaptist	Baptist	Evangelical	Fundamental	Mainline Protestant	Orthodox	Other Catholic	Pentecostal	Roman Catholic
Yes	4	2	3	26	9	5	7	4	9	14
No		2	1	2						
Neither	2	2	1	4					1	5

tomb, inc. Stewardship Project National Advisory Committee assembled a second time. The sixteen representatives included top stewardship officials from 14 Protestant communions, one Roman Catholic Archbishop, and a seminary vice president in charge of development.

The 14 Protestant communions could be generally classified into seven conservative and seven mainline traditions. Together, the fifteen denominational representatives were affiliated with communions that included an estimated 55% of all church members in the

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between “Evangelical” and “Fundamental” is somewhat imprecise in several cases. The communions included in the “Fundamental” category in this discussion either used the work “fundamental” in their title or self-description in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, or cited theological tenets that generally fall within the definition of “Fundamental.”

United States.<sup>4</sup>

Before they attended the meeting, the National Advisory Committee members were sent drafts of the findings from the multiyear Stewardship Project research.<sup>5</sup> At the meeting, these national leaders were asked to develop a list of points about the practice of financial stewardship within the church in the United States. Only points on which there was consensus among all group members would be included in the list. The leaders also agreed that the conclusions would not be “word-smithed.” Rather the points would describe general themes that could be refined or developed within a specific tradition.

The list that developed was as follows.

1. Owning the gap between beliefs and practice.
2. Recognizing creative tension between reality and vision.
3. Need for conversion/formation which is part of the process.
4. Leadership needs conversion and formation in personal stewardship, and to be given a level of confidence and courage in terms of corporate leadership.
5. A whole-life response to the Great Commands of Jesus (Mk. 12:29-31) to be disciples who are stewards.
6. The church needs a positive agenda for the great affluence in our society.
7. Healthy churches produce generous people.

**Formulating a Positive Agenda for Affluence.** A positive agenda for affluence, referred to in point 6 above, implies a constructive application of the increased resources available to residents of the U.S. The National Advisory Committee participants were focused on the stewardship, or financial discipleship, of church members. These church members have a shared general set of stated beliefs that include responsibilities and behavior expectations. Giving of money is a common theme. A positive agenda for affluence, then, would be one that would engage members to the degree that they would

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<sup>4</sup> The communions, and the related representative, were: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, Rev. Robert L. Niklaus, Office of Communication and Funding; Church of God (Anderson, IN), Dr. James E. Williams, Executive Director, World Service; Church of God (Cleveland, TN), Mr. Al Taylor, Director of Stewardship; Church of the Brethren: Mr. Dale E. Minnich, Executive, General Services Commission; Church of the Nazarene, Dr. Robert Foster, Headquarters Financial Officer; The Episcopal Church, Rev. Hugh Magers, Director of Stewardship; The Evangelical Covenant Church, Dr. Timothy C. Ek, Vice President; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rev. Mark Moller-Gunderson, Executive Director, Division for Congregational Ministries; Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Rev. Ronald Nelson, Assistant Stewardship Counselor; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Dr. David McCreath, Coordinator of Stewardship Education; Roman Catholic Church, Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy, Archbishop of Seattle; Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. James Austin, Vice President, Stewardship Commission; The United Methodist Church, Rev. Herbert Mather, General Board of Discipleship; and Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, Dr. David Heetland, Vice President for Development.

<sup>5</sup> These results were later published as *Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church* by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), currently out of print. The discussion of the consensus points appears on p. 293.

increase their participation in the positive behavior of giving money to help others through the church.

The authors of the present study also directed the empty tomb, inc. Stewardship Project. The giving trends, in contrast to the potential for improved giving, that are considered in earlier chapters of the present volume suggest that church members in the United States have not yet embraced a common reason to increase giving in keeping with their potential. Chapter 8 in *The State of Church Giving through 1998* offered a systems analysis of conditions in church organization that discourage giving in congregations.<sup>6</sup> The current discussion explores a strategy that would provide a reason for church members to increase giving significantly.

What would a “positive agenda for affluence” look like? The agenda would have to be compelling, and self-evident. On a practical level, this positive agenda for affluence would be in direct competition with the more generally-accepted cultural agenda of self-gratification that emphasizes consumption and accumulation. While a positive agenda for affluence would not be expected to replace the current consumer culture, it would have to be strong enough to be able to hold its own against that economic juggernaut. Current giving levels suggest that, for most church members, there is not much of a tension between the two ideas. The expectation would be that the positive agenda for affluence would attract church members sufficiently that they would work more actively to balance it with the constant pull of the consumer culture.

On consideration, one compelling and self-evident agenda for the church in the U.S. might be stopping global child deaths. Because the agenda would be proposed to church members, and therefore action would be rooted in the religious impulse based on shared tenets, the agenda could also include the theological component summarized by the phrase, “in Jesus’ name.”

The need represented in this formulation is certainly compelling. UNICEF has estimated that 10.6 million children under the age of five die annually around the globe.<sup>7</sup> That works out to 29 thousand children each day of the year.

The vast majority of these child-deaths occur in countries other than the United States and other industrialized countries. The total for under-five deaths in the U.S. was 30,000 a year in 1999, a number about equal to the *daily* total for the world. Thus, the agenda ought to incorporate a global view.

Another factor recommending this agenda is that experts suggest that most of the deaths are due to preventable conditions. An estimate from the early 1990s suggested that \$2.5 billion a year could address the worst of the nutritional and health-related factors that contribute to and, in combination, often cause, these deaths. Updating that figure for inflation and growth, it may be estimated that under \$5 billion a year could impact this need. That figure is less than 4% of the potential in increased giving that could be available were church members to move toward a giving average equal to the classic tithe. Thus, addressing this goal would not require an immediate, major dislocation of

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<sup>6</sup> John Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *The State of Church Giving through 1998* (Champaign, IL: empty tomb, inc., 2000), pp.77-95.

<sup>7</sup> Carol Bellamy, *The State of the World's Children 2001* (New York: UNICEF, 2001), p. 81.

current lifestyles in order to make progress toward success.

In presentations by the authors, a concern has been occasionally voiced about one component of this agenda. The point is made that an improved survival rate among the world's children will mean more mouths to feed for the global community, aggravating world population growth. However, demographics suggest that, as the child death rate declines, the birth rate is soon declining faster. This trend can be measured in "least developed" as well as "developing" countries. Thus, increased survival among children likely would, in the longer term, actually help to stabilize world population growth.

Another important aspect of this suggested agenda is that it is consistent with the basic profession of the faith that is common across the theological spectrum. The Christian tradition, building on the Hebrew Scriptures, places a strong emphasis on the care of those weaker, particularly children. Further, an analysis of the child-death rates of various countries indicated that most of the deaths occur in areas where the church is not strongly represented. Thus, the agenda is broad enough to attract the interest of the entire theological spectrum of the church. Whether a specific tradition places a heavier emphasis on word or deed outreach, or combines them, meeting the described need could involve both types of outreach.

**Developing a Forum for Discussion.** Presently, no national forum exists for church leaders to evaluate whether the proposed positive agenda for affluence would be a constructive one that a broad spectrum of traditions could endorse and recommend to all church members.

Were such a forum to exist, additional issues would also likely be discussed. For example, how would this agenda be balanced with other priorities? In many cases, emphasizing this agenda would complement special interests already being pursued. Literacy, health, education, and agriculture initiatives would all be involved in reaching the goal. However, other interests and points of emphasis might be less clearly related. In what way would national church leaders want to balance a broad common agenda with the more specific agendas within their own traditions? Would the value of having a clearly accepted common purpose across many traditions outweigh any fears about impact on distinct identities among the traditions?

These and other issues would need to be explored by leaders in a setting perceived as safe.

This type of setting is not currently available. Lacking any other forum, mailing a Response Form to national church leaders appeared to be a first step. By including a space for comments, the Response Form might encourage the beginning of a national discussion. If the currently proposed agenda, of stopping, in Jesus' name, global child deaths, were not deemed attractive, perhaps a consensus would develop that identified an alternative.

**Methodology in Brief.** The Methodology section at the end of this chapter details the actual implementation of the survey in detail. Briefly, the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* was consulted for a list of denominations within the United States. Leaders from each communion were identified. Each leader was sent up to three mailings.

The mailings included a cover letter, a National Church Leaders Response Form, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The first general mailing was sent on May 11, 2001. The second was sent on June 14, 2001. The third was sent on September 24, 2001.

The letter stated that comments were welcome and might be used in the chapter that would incorporate the results of the survey. Respondents were also offered a copy of the present report, which they could request by checking a box on the Response Form.

Table 21 provides the list of 202 denominations, the names, titles, and location of the national leaders receiving the mailings, and the responses received.

*A SUMMARY OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES.* Given that no national forum exists for the exchange of ideas on a topic such as the present one, it is hoped that the following overview may begin a process of dialogue.

**“No.”** Five of the respondents did check “No,” and returned the Form.

Four of the five respondents who checked “No” included comments or explanations for their opinions.

Dr. Galen Wiley, who was the Past Moderator of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches at the time of the second mailing, offered the following explanation for his “No” response. “This is not the mission of the church. We are here to prevent eternal death through the power of the gospel. Though it is exciting as Christians to choose to give to causes like this, our mission in the world is far larger.”

Mr. Ted Church, clerk of the Intermountain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Unaffiliated), objected to the inclusion of specific religious wording. “I am sorry but no individual may speak for the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker). As an individual, I agree with your statement EXCEPT for the last three words [“in Jesus’ name”]. Those words effectively discriminate against others who have faith in God but follow different paths!”

The view expressed by Professor Ronald Roehl, Moderator of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, seemed to suggest that his disagreement was with emphasis. He wrote, “The statement bypasses the reason and motive for giving—to spread the good news that Jesus died for our sins. The gospel news should move the heart to give and move people everywhere to prevent child deaths as possible.”

Mr. Don Doezema, Stated Clerk of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, had a more practical objection. “I fail to see how simply increased giving will solve the problem addressed.”

**“Neither.”** Fifteen respondents chose neither the Yes or No options.

Seven indicated that they chose not to respond either because they routinely do not respond to surveys, or had questions about the origin and eventual use of this one.

In the Catholic Church in the U.S.A., both Bishop Daniel F. Walsh of the Diocese of Santa Rosa and Bishop Raymond Boland of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph indicated that they routinely do not respond to surveys. On behalf of Edward Cardinal Egan of New York, Rev. John Bonnici wrote a letter rather than return the Response Form.

He indicated that questions about the ultimate use of the survey precluded a response within the requested time frame, and he suggested that the U.S. Catholic Conference might be contacted about “data on Church contributions in America.”

Similar questions about the eventual use of the survey were the basis cited by Rev. Michael Glodo, Stated Clerk of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and Rev. Shirley Cheatham, General Secretary of the Free Christian Zion Church of Christ, as the reason they chose neither Yes or No.

Gary Kilgore, General Director of Administration and Finance for the Free Methodist Church of North America, wrote that “Our denomination has chosen not to participate in this survey.”

Robert Gosner of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Conservative) returned only part of the form. He had cut off the page below the section that listed the name, title, affiliation and address of the respondent.

Five other respondents expressed opinions that could be regarded as negative in tone, even though neither Yes or No was marked on a Response Form.

In a letter written on behalf of Francis Cardinal George of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Rev. Raymond Baumhart, S.J., stated that, “In response to your letter of June 14, Cardinal George prefers not to answer YES or NO. Of course he wants to stop ‘preventable global child deaths.’ However, the obligation to do so seems to belong primarily to civil government, rather than to the churches in our society. If members of the Catholic Church in Chicago were to increase giving to the Church, the Cardinal would probably spend it on causes for which the Church is primarily responsible, e.g., evangelization and catechesis.”

Bishop Anthony Bosco of the Diocese of Greensburg also chose to write a letter rather than return the Response Form with either Yes or No marked. He stated simply, “Dear Friends, At this time I do not care to be a signatory in response to your request.”

Mr. Wallace B. Pittman, Jr., the General Moderator of the Pentecostal Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, seemed to be suggesting an alternative agenda. Without checking either Yes or No, he wrote on his Response Form, “We need to cry out against murder through abortion in this nation.”

The third mailing to Rev. John Gilmore, Secretary of the General Conference of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was returned, unopened, with the word “REFUSED” written across the label. The returned packet, in a U.S. Priority Mail envelope, was received on October 10, 2001.

Four additional leaders commented on giving priorities.

Elder T. W. Samuels, President of the National Convention of the National Primitive Baptist Convention, Inc., crossed out the words “in an effort to stop the millions of annual preventable global child deaths in Jesus name” on the Response Form, and inserted a period after the word “churches.” He then wrote, “Giving should be done along Scripture directives, because the ‘Word of God’ says so. The matter of preventing global child deaths is an administrative matter—how the funds are disbursed from the local church



and beyond. Hope my comment is seriously considered.”

Mr. Ronald Habegger of the Evangelical Mennonite Church explained his response as follows. “I chose to not mark a yes/no response. The statement implies that increased giving will stop preventable child deaths. My experience has been when people get involved for any cause they find a way to get the work done regardless of how much is given.”

Mr. Paul A. Boeker is the Administrator of the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches. He interacted with the implications of the statement. He raised questions ranging from how giving relates to the prevention of child deaths to the meaning of “preventable” in the statement.

The Rev. Dr. Robert E. Sawyer, President of the Provincial Elders’ Conference of the Moravian Church in America (Southern Province), also did not check Yes or No. He wrote “Abstain!” Indicating that more funds to stop global child deaths would certainly be welcome, he objected to the tone of the statement. He wrote, “I don’t tell people how they ‘should’ be giving.” He also expressed concerns about how the results would be used, indicating the Response Form was “too vague, too little info to sign.”

The two anonymous responses were included under the “Neither” category. One empty, sealed return envelope was received without a Response Form enclosed.

The other anonymous response was a sealed return envelope containing only 11 business-size cards that each read, “Evangelization for the Trimillenium, The GOSPEL, God’s Only Son Preaching Eternal Life.”

**“Yes.”** The majority of respondents, 79%, checked Yes on the Response Form.

Of the 83 Yes responses, 57 of these respondents checked Yes without further comment. Of the 26 who checked Yes and provided further observations, the observations could be categorized into four general topics.

***Statement Clarification.*** As noted above, three respondents indicated Yes indicating a reservation about how the Response Form statement could be misinterpreted.

Rev. Robert M. Overgaard, Sr., of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, wrote, “Substance, ‘Yes!’ Grammar? Awkward. The phrase ‘in Jesus’ name’ would be better placed after the word, ‘should.’ Much less satisfactory, add a — before ‘—in Jesus’ name.’”

His Eminence Nathaniel Popp, Ruling Bishop of The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, also was troubled by the placement of the same three words. “I would suggest taking the last three words, ‘in Jesus’ name’ and place them at the beginning of the statement . . . it may be misinterpreted that child deaths are brought about those acting in the name of Jesus. Thank you.”

His Eminence Antony, Archbishop of New York of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A., checked both Yes and No, indicating that his Yes was contingent upon a similar revision in the statement. “I am uncomfortable with the way the statement is phrased. I would prefer it to read “ . . . should increase giving in Jesus’ name through their churches . . . ’ If the statement is not changed, I cannot support it.”

All three respondents saw through the wording to the actual intent of the statement.

**A Qualified Yes.** Mr. Jon Zens of the Sovereign Grace Believers, checked “Yes” on his Response Form but wrote comments that indicated that he was ambivalent. He objected to the wording of the statement, and then observed, “But coming from a non-denominational perspective, I see giving primarily as most meaningful at a grass-roots level, that is, giving to the needy in one’s immediate context, and supporting children through organizations like Compassion International. Further, it is lamentable to have a consensus on this question, and yet not agree on what the Gospel is. The truth is, my answer would not be Yes/No but ‘Neither.’”

**Comments on the Agenda.** Twelve of the respondents checking Yes also had comments on the proposed agenda.

The most concise was Dr. Don Arnold, President of Ministers International, who wrote the one word, “Thanks.”

Mr. David E. Ross, Executive Director of the Advent Christian Church, expanded that thought. “Thank you for the work you are doing, pointing out the great potential available in existing church instruments for ministry (such as denominations). The disagreement among Christians is blown way out of proportion by the media. What we have in common is so much more powerful, and important! The distinctions (differences) which we have among denominations have more to do with points of emphasis and passion (i.e.—’My favorite aspect of the Gospel is . . .’) than difference.”

Dr. Charles Wasielewski, International Moderator of the American Evangelical Christian Churches, observed, “I believe that too much money goes to overhead in most organizations. A larger share must go to helping children around the globe.”

Bishop Charles W. Ingram Gorazd, Presiding Bishop of the Apostolic Orthodox Catholic Church, wrote, “Church members are concerned about the abortion issue in this country and the world and turn a deaf ear to the thousands of children that by a lack of care die horrible deaths through neglect and indifference. Informed members will and do care!”

Rev. Dr. Kenneth O. Hoke, General Secretary of the Brethren in Christ Church, felt that the present agenda could be addressed while others are also pursued. He wrote, “The reality is that we would not only meet this need, but also do much more in many other areas of ministry and outreach in Jesus’ name.”

Bishop James E. McKnight, Presiding Bishop of the Church of God by Faith, Inc., commented on the church’s ability to do more as well. “I feel that the Church can increase in giving on an annual global basis to help prevent poverty conditions. I also believe that we should strive to help prevent such conditions here in the United States first, as charity begins at home.”

The Rev. Clifford R. Christensen, Conference Minister of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference checked Yes on the Response Form, and also was struck with the potential to address another issue as well. “Just think of the millions of preventable U.S. child deaths that could be stopped in Jesus’ name if churches would unite in opposing abortion!”

Rev. Endia Scruggs, Past Moderator of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, reflected on the potential of the church as well. “I suppose if the statement in your mailing about the ‘classic tithe’ is read in our churches, the response would be great. Information is an impacting tool!”

Mr. Paul Anderson commented that “Churches in our Fellowship do respond when we make appeals for World Relief, the relief branch of the NAE [National Association of Evangelicals].”

Dr. George L. Miller, President and CEO of The Evangelical Church Alliance, saw the potential for addressing several agendas. “If church members would begin giving according to the biblical principles—tithing, the church would be in a position to meet many needs including the one above.”

Mr. Simeon Strauser, Chairperson of the Council of Trustees of the Full Gospel Assemblies International, in addition to checking Yes, wrote, “Cross denominational networking efforts are key to success with such a need.”

Most of the Response Forms returned were from the first two mailings. After the second mailing, 88 replies had been received. After the third mailing, sent on September 24, 2001, that number increased to 105. Bishop Albert J. Berube, Chancellor of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church (Archdiocese of New York) checked Yes on the Response Form and wrote, “In light of the 11 Sep 01 incident we would like to see how your proposal and the needs of our local communities would work out.”

*Spiritual Dimensions.* Ten of the respondents who checked Yes also reflected on the spiritual implications of the proposed agenda.

Mr. Ken Gillming, Sr., President of the Baptist Bible Fellowship, observed that “Giving is a thermometer of our heart toward Christ. May we in practical Christianity exemplify the model of the Scriptures.”

Dr. Robert S. Ricker, President and CEO of the Baptist General Conference, wrote, “Self interest and greed have replaced abandonment to Christ, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. As income rises the percentage of contribution often decreases.”

Mr. David L. Miller of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches reflected on the goal. “I continue to feel that the area of Christian stewardship is perhaps one of the more elusive ideals. This is true even in churches who are known for orthodox theology and conservative lifestyle. It ought not to be so.”

Bishop James C. Timlin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton checked Yes and observed, “We are our brother’s keeper and we must always do what we can to share what we have with those in need.”

Mr. Whaid Rose, President of The Church of God (Seventh Day), Denver, Colorado, wrote, “Ours is a blessed nation because of our generosity and benevolence to other nations. However, such acts of kindness have too often been done by Government instead of the Church. God has given much to the Church in America and He requires much from us.”

Bishop Chet Smith is General Superintendent of the Congregational Holiness Church.

He observed, “The C.H. Church emphasizes ‘tithing’ as God’s principle of Christian Commitment. Less devotees will give less than God’s requirement.”

Rev. Mark Franklin, President of the Fellowship of Fundamental Bible Churches, cited a Bible verse in support of his comment. “The mandate upon the church is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to ‘everyone.’ A result of God’s truth touching the heart will be a benevolence toward the needy, specifically children (James 1:27).”

The Right Reverend Serhij K. Pastukhiv, Administrator of the Holy Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Exile, offered that “We are only on trial in this world for short period before eternity.”

Brother Willie B. Oliver, General Secretary of the Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church, checked Yes and added, “It is the blessed way to stop these preventable global child deaths and I fully endorse it. Thanks!”

Finally, The Right Reverend Odell McCollum, General President of the United Holy Church of America, Inc., expanded his check mark in the Yes box. “Giving to help others is a biblical thought. Those who need help should expect help from the church.”

**TWO COMMUNION-SPECIFIC ANALYSES. Roman Catholic Responses.** The Catholic Church in the U.S.A. is the largest single communion in America. As explained in the Methodology section, the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church were on the initial mailing list. This decision was made because of the vast portion of church members in the U.S. represented by this single communion. A total of 176 bishops, archbishops, cardinals and one diocesan administrator received the first mailing of the National Church Leaders Response Form.<sup>8</sup>

Only the bishops serving as the President and the Vice President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops received the third mailing. Since neither of these two bishops returned a Response Form, the Catholic Church in the U.S.A. was not included in the count of denominations that responded.

Nineteen of the 176 potential Roman Catholic respondents did return a form. This rate of return represented 11% of the forms mailed out to Roman Catholic leaders. That compared to 84 of 268, or 31%, returned by non-Roman Catholics, of the forms mailed to the other communions. Of the 105 responses returned, the 19 Catholic responses represented 18% of the total.

Fourteen, or 74%, of the Roman Catholic Response Forms were checked Yes, and five, or 26%, were classified as “Neither.”

Of the Yes responses, one archbishop and 11 bishops returned the form with Yes checked. In addition, the Vicar for Administration of the Archdiocese of San Francisco checked Yes and returned the form sent to that archbishop.

**Southern Baptist Convention Responses.** The second largest communion in the U.S. is the Southern Baptist Convention. No Response Form was received from either of the two officials who were identified as national leaders of that communion. However, between the time that the second and third mailings were sent, the authors gave

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<sup>8</sup>The list of Catholic bishops was obtained from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; © April 02, 2001; <<http://www.nccbuscc.org/state.htm>>; pp. 1-31 of 4/6/01 9:01 AM printout.

a presentation to a national meeting of state convention stewardship officers.

Twenty-four Southern Baptist regional officials attended the July 2001 meeting. In addition, three officials having national responsibilities with the Convention were also present. These 27 people were provided with a National Church Leaders Response Form, and invited to fill it out.

Of the three officials with national responsibilities present, one turned in a Response Form. Norma J. Goldman is the Editorial Team Leader of LifeWay Christian Resources, one of five general boards and commissions of the Southern Baptist Convention. She checked Yes and wrote, “American Christians lack the vision of how we could be used to meet the need—ministering in Jesus’ name to meet physical and spiritual needs—of a lost and dying world, partnering with God.”

Thirteen regional officials turned in the form at that time. Twelve checked Yes, and one response was classified as “Neither.”

Choosing not to mark Yes or No, Bob Ethridge, Information Resources Team Director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, explained, “Certainly, church members should give more if possible—but for meeting numerous needs in Jesus’ name—not just this one.”

Others who responded Yes embraced the idea that a common vision could strengthen the church for better service all around. Three offered strategy suggestions. Clarence E. Hackett, Stewardship Department Director of the Florida Baptist Convention, wrote, “A vision and process needs to be shared and prioritized by national and state leaders through the Cooperative Program and in designated giving. Members respond to needs when they know them.”

Douglas T. Strader, Stewardship Director for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, noted, “Denominational Leaders (National and State) and Pastors/staff must face our own affluence, and adjust our lifestyles to come to grips with, ‘How much is enough?’”

The Director of Growth/Health of the Minnesota/Wisconsin Baptist Convention, Norman Wallace, outlined the role of a special segment of the church. “Issues of war, poverty, politics are formidable. This vision requires clear vision, urgent prayer, collaboration of helping groups, passion of youth and young adults.”

David Michel, Associate Executive Director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, wrote: “Giving should be increased because of the level of affluence currently enjoyed in the USA, and because the biblical standard encourages a minimum giving level to the church of ten percent of income. Preventing childrens’ untimely deaths will result as Christians awaken to a larger and more compassionate vision of redeeming the entire world.”

**CONCLUSIONS.** The response to the National Church Leaders Response Form mailings suggests that there is an interest among a large segment of national church leaders in the exchange of ideas. The return rate of 41% among the communions surveyed indicates that leaders from diverse theological viewpoints may be willing to engage in dialogue on a topic of mutual concern.

Further, the large majority of those responding Yes suggests that there may be grounds

for developing a consensus across the theological spectrum.

Currently, no neutral forum is available at which all the traditions responding to the survey would feel comfortable. However, the responses to the National Church Leaders Response Form suggest that the development of a national dialogue about a positive agenda for affluence might be a constructive step.

The results of the National Church Leaders Response Form are therefore offered in hope, as seeds that can be sown on “good soil,” to produce a crop of 30, 60 or even 100-fold” (Mt. 13:8).

***THE NATIONAL LEADERS RESPONSE FORM DETAIL.*** The following table provides the list of the national church leaders who were sent the National Church Leaders Response Form mailing. The table provides the denomination name, the name of the leader, the leader’s official position, the leader’s city, state and zip code.

The next column lists the number of mailings the leader were sent. A description of the mailing procedures is included in the Methodology section following the table.

The “Date Reply Recd.” column provides the date the returned Response Form was received.

The Yes/No column has one of three options. “Y” indicates the Response Form was marked Yes. “N” indicates the Response Form was marked No. “O” indicates that a response was received that could not be classified as either Yes or No, and therefore was classified as Neither.

The last column presents any comments written in response to the mailing. It also includes some details of the mailing process.