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The State of Church Giving through 2021: Intentional Miracles (33rd Edition, May 2024)

“You can serve God or Money.” — Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:24

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” — Jesus addressing the disciples in John 14:12

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up ... ‘However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’ ” — Jesus addressing the disciples in Luke 18:1, 8

Chapters 1-5, Data Trends: The 33rd edition in *The State of Church Giving* series found that the longstanding downward trends in giving as a percent of income and membership as a percent of population had not abated as of 2021. Further, the trends were evident across the theological spectrum (pp. 7-62).

Chapter 6, The Potential of the Church: Data suggests church members have the potential to increase giving to previously unseen levels. However, to date, this potential has not been reached (pp. 63-96).

Chapter 7, Why and How Much Do Americans Give?: In 2021, Americans told the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey that 56% of their giving went to “church, religious organizations.” The Under-25 cohort indicated 65% of their giving went to “church, religious organizations,” suggesting that young people who donate to charity learn about philanthropy in religious settings. Downward trends in church giving and membership will likely be felt in other areas of philanthropy (pp. 97-132).

Chapter 8, Intentional Miracles: This is an age of affluence. Church members can make it an age of intentional miracles. In chapter 8, an “intentional miracle” is described as church people pursuing “the functional equivalent of Jesus’ miracle ministry because of the available resources God has entrusted to the current body of Christ” (p. 134). *How does pursuing intentional miracles prepare for the future?*

The present-day church: Gallup and other sources describe a decrease in church membership. The first seven chapters of this volume describe long-term downward trends in giving. The largest donations rarely are directed to churches. Strengthening of the church is one reason, but likely not the main one, to pursue the idea of intentional miracles, thereby perhaps impacting the future trajectory of the church in a positive way (pp. 135-138).

World neighbors: Many global neighbors are in desperate need. Each day, over 4,000 children under the age of five in 40 countries die of treatable causes. The church could provide leadership, in Jesus’ name, for a mobilization on behalf of these neighbors who continue in desperate need (pp. 138-146).

The general good: Retail crime has increased nationally. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* pondered on its cover story: “What’s Lost When Religion Fades” (p. 136). Health issues like obesity affect a large section of the population. Deaths of despair are associated with a lack of religious participation (pp. 146-148).

The youth: Psychologists found higher levels of anxiety in children in the general population in the 1980s than were found in those under psychiatric care in the 1950s. Experts suggest the amount of screen time that young people spend with technology can have negative impacts. In 2019, gun violence became the leading cause of death among children birth to 19 years. Churches pursuing intentional miracles at-scale with the global need may speak volumes to young people being lost to anxiety, violence, and confusion about their larger purpose (pp. 148-150).

Individual church members: Mary Alice Tenney summarized John Wesley’s view of materialists as “disbelievers in the eternal.” If churches are not yet ready to discount that there is an afterlife, then church leadership has a responsibility to help each church member change priorities from materialism to God, from the immediate to the eternal (pp. 150-152).

This special age. Church members live in an age of affluence never seen before. As Americans spend \$447.38 billion on soft drinks, and \$963 billion on leisure travel, churches can lead members to reduce, in Jesus’ name, global child deaths for an additional \$16 billion a year through their congregations (pp. 152-157).

An example of a potential intentional miracle. Mobilizing the 300,000+ Christian congregations in the U.S. to use their own channels, to reduce, in Jesus’ name, under-age-5 child deaths from treatable causes in 40 countries seems like an accessible challenge that could appeal to a broad swath of Christians, older and young. One effort offers matching funds for congregational initiatives in this category (pp. 157-165).

Are intentional miracles even possible? The question is not actually whether intentional miracles are possible, but rather, within the Christian worldview, whether church members in an age of affluence will choose to make them happen (pp. 165-169).