

feature article

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Strong Forecast

Larger Churches Optimistic Despite Recessionary Pressures
by Ronald E. Keener

The results of the **2008 Salary Survey** by Leadership Network and Church Executive show cause for a strong year in 2009, even under tightening conditions.

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The news is mixed among larger churches surveyed about the impact of tough economic times on their congregations.

The 105 large churches surveyed by Leadership Network this summer said they were "minimally" or "not at all" affected (56%) by the downturn in the economy, while 41% responded "somewhat negatively" and 3% "very negatively" on the question.

74% of surveyed churches expect increased income in 2009.

Both attendance and financial offerings appeared to be mildly positive in the majority of the churches surveyed, with attendance up more than offerings since January of this year ([see chart](#)).

"Most of these churches were already growing, and so they are continuing their growth pattern despite today's more challenging economic pressures," says Leadership Network's Warren Bird, director of research.

The survey of salary and economic outlooks was derived from 105 churches . . .

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Church Healthcare Network to Serve America's Uninsured

ECHO, Empowering Church Healthcare Outreach, is making steady progress in providing quality medical care to America's uninsured. After working with Leadership Network to build a Leadership Community of churches involved in healthcare ministries, ECHO was launched in 2007 to empower more churches to get engaged in providing healthcare to people in need in their communities.

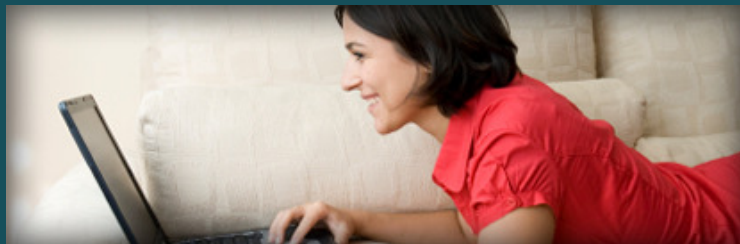
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Reasons Young Adults Drop Out of Church

Earlier this year, LifeWay Research released a study on reasons 18 to 22 year olds drop out of church. According to the study, 70% of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22.

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Nearly Half of Web Users Search Daily

On a typical day, 49% of U.S. Internet users use search technology to either find web sites or search within a particular site, up from about 30% in 2004 and 40% in 2005, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a unit of Pew Research Center.

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feature article

*The results of the **2008 Salary Survey** by Leadership Network and Church Executive show cause for a strong year in 2009, even under tightening conditions.*

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The news is mixed among larger churches



Strong Forecast

Larger Churches Optimistic Despite Recessionary Pressures
by Ronald E. Keener

"Most of these churches were already growing, and so they are continuing their growth pattern despite today's more challenging economic pressures," says Leadership Network's Warren Bird, director of research.

The survey of salary and economic outlooks was derived from 105 churches with attendances of 1,400 to 10,100. It is not a scientific or random sample of larger churches, but rather a sampling of those who self-selected to participate in a 208-item online survey.

The sample size was considerably larger than the previous edition of the survey, which was conducted in 2006. *Church Executive* was a participating partner for the survey in both years.

Churches Expecting Increased Income

In terms of expected income this year, 74% of surveyed churches expect that income will increase in 2009, while 66% expect that their church will probably meet its budget this year and 28% said they probably would not meet budget. Two years ago, the latter group constituted only 4% who would not meet budget.

74% of surveyed churches expect increased income in 2009.

While 74% of surveyed churches expect their income will increase next year, that's down from 96% two years ago. Nevertheless, 13% expect income to remain the same and only 12% predict a decrease. The latter data is the first time in the survey that any church has predicted a decrease.

An open-ended question asked church leaders what they are doing to prepare their people for the potential of a significant national recession. Half the churches responded and expressed such thoughts as staying on message, increasing financial counseling, doing more stewardship training, monitoring the church budget more carefully, decreasing church debt, helping people get out of debt, and job coaching when people lose a job.

Four Respondent Groups Defined

The high response rate from 30 states allowed the responses to be split into four groups: Attendance of 1,400 to 2,999, 3,000 to 4,999, 5,000 to 6,999, and 7,000 and more. The number of churches in each group was 62, 28, 9 and 7. Among respondents, the typical church offers five weekend services, more than the national norm of two for Protestant churches.

The survey also produces data on staff costs, staffing ratios, numbers of direct reports, salaries, benefits, medical insurance, and pay increases, among other data.

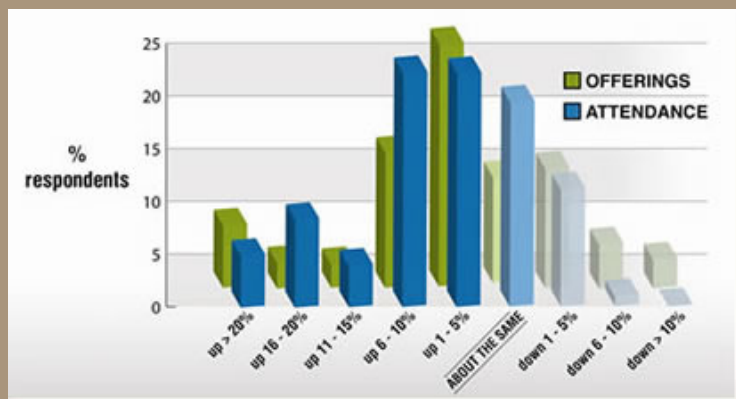
Ratios of staff to church attendees was 1:45, or one staff member to every 45 attendees (calculated from an average number of 70 staff and an average attendance among the 105 churches of 3,178). In 2006 the ratio averaged 1:59.

Salaries for the senior pastor or the directional leader rose \$7,000 in two years, from an average of \$132,000 to \$139,000; the highest salary was \$300,000, down from \$364,000 two years ago. Executive pastors' salaries also rose \$7,000 in two years, from \$90,000 to \$97,000, with the highest at \$167,000. (Salary information for 32 other titles is also included in the complete report, see links at the end of the article.)

surveyed about the impact of tough economic times on their congregations.

The 105 large churches surveyed by Leadership Network this summer said they were "minimally" or "not at all" affected (56%) by the downturn in the economy, while 41% responded "somewhat negatively" and 3% "very negatively" on the question.

Both attendance and financial offerings appeared to be mildly positive in the majority of the churches surveyed, with attendance up more than offerings since January of this year (see chart).



Both attendance and offerings have increased since January, 2008.

Average ratio of staff members to church attendees: 1:45

**Most likely
staff pay
increase: 3.1%**

Pay increases among 72% of the churches were reported at 3% or more, while 15% went as high as a 5% raise. A total of 91% of churches are planning to give staff pay increases. The responses to this question did not vary much with church size.

What major emphases are churches expecting in year 2009? Leading the way are a capital funds drive for new property or building--30%, down from 44% in 2006--followed by a special campaign to help the poor and needy (25%), and an appeal to plant new congregations (23%, the same number as two years ago).

Missions Giving Increases

By church size, the largest group (7,000 and higher attendance) expects to increase spending in missions, facilities and communications. Nevertheless, none of the 105 churches indicated a "significant decrease" in any of the seven categories named, and very few projected a "moderate decrease."

"The survey," says Bird, "gives selective insight into what's ahead. If nothing else, it shows that the surveyed churches are going forward, growing and reaching out. They seem to reflect much hope for the months ahead."

For a copy of the "2008 Leadership Network Salary and Economic Outlook Report," including charts and graphs, go to Leadnet.org/salary. Reference the extended article in *Church Executive*.

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**Largest churches
expect to
increase spending
in missions,
facilities and
communications.**

[2008 Leadership Network Salary and Economic Outlook Report](#)

[Paying Your Pastor and Coping with Today's Economic Downturn](#) (podcast)

Authors' commentary on the 2008 Salary Survey and Economic Outlook Report, plus pastor interviews about leading in tough economic times.

[2008 Salary Survey Slide Presentation](#) (PowerPoint)

A slide presentation of the graphics included in this report.

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in brief

Church Healthcare Network to Serve America's Uninsured

ECHO, Empowering Church Healthcare Outreach, is making steady progress in providing quality medical care to America's uninsured. After working with Leadership Network to build a Leadership Community of churches involved in healthcare ministries, ECHO was launched in 2007 to empower more churches to get engaged in providing healthcare to people in need in their communities.



With a goal to start 10,000 primary-care clinics by 2030 and provide quality medical care for more than 20 million uninsured people in the United States, it is currently helping 9 churches--four in Texas--start clinics.

"It is so clearly an extension of the gospel," says Tim Dammon, executive director of ECHO. "Jesus himself clearly called the church to be engaged with the poor and to meet needs. When I sit down and talk to pastors, there has not been one who has said that this is not what the New Testament church ought to be doing. I think that is what makes me so passionate about this."

ECHO recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Baptist General Convention of Texas documenting the groups' mutual interest to help affiliated churches launch healthcare ministries. Dammon also plans to attend the BGCT annual meeting to inform pastors how their churches can start primary-care clinics. Read the following article that describes how a Tyler, TX church was helped.

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Reasons Young Adults Drop Out of Church

Earlier this year, LifeWay Research released a study on reasons 18 to 22 year olds drop out of church. According to the study, 70% of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22.



In most cases, the decision to leave was not planned far in advance. Only 20% of these "church dropouts" agree that while they were attending church regularly in high school they "planned on taking a break from church once [they] finished high school."

Life changes or life situations cause young people to leave the church. In fact, 97% of dropouts list one or more specific life-change issues as a reason they left church. Six of the top 10 reasons church dropouts leave relate to life changes.

The most frequent reason for leaving church is, in fact, a self-imposed change, "I simply wanted a break from church" (27%).

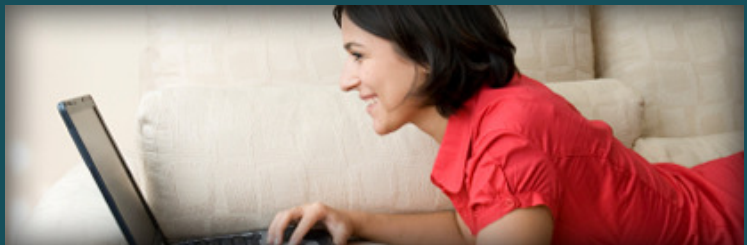
The paths toward college and the workforce are also strong reasons for young people to leave church: "I moved to college and stopped attending church" (25%) and "work responsibilities prevented me from attending" (23%).

58% of church dropouts selected at least one church or pastor-related reason for leaving church. Most common was, "church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical" (26%). Another 20% "didn't feel connected to the people in my church."

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On a typical day, 49% of U.S. Internet users use search technology to either find web sites or search within a particular site, up from about 30% in 2004 and 40% in 2005, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a unit of Pew Research Center.



Pew found that the use of Internet search rises along with education and income. Among consumers with incomes of \$50,000 or more, at least 56% search on a typical day, compared to less than 40% for those with incomes under \$50,000. While 66% of college graduates are likely to search on a typical day, the figure is 32% for consumers with no more than a high school diploma.

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