

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 29, 2012 at 11:21am

Survey: Economy continues negative effect on churches

by Adelle M. Banks by Religion News Service

The economy continues to weigh on pastors, with a new survey showing that almost two-thirds say it has affected their churches negatively.

LifeWay Research asked 1,000 pastors about the economy's effect on their churches and found that 56 percent described it somewhat negatively and 8 percent very negatively. Nine percent reported a positive effect on their churches and one-quarter said the economy was having "no impact on my church."

"Pastor views on the economy are similar to many economic outlook surveys," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research, which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. "We weren't surprised the current perspective of economic impact on churches is predominantly negative."

A Gallup poll released Tuesday found that 43 percent of Americans call the country's economic conditions "poor," compared to 13 percent who say they are "good" or "excellent." Almost 6 in 10 expect the economy to worsen and 35 percent perceive improvement.

Despite pastors' negative views on the economy and their churches, LifeWay researchers found a trend in fewer churches reporting declines in giving. While 23 percent of churches reported lower giving in 2010 than the previous year, just 15 percent of churches said giving through May 2012 was below 2011 figures.

LifeWay's most recent research is based on a May telephone survey that had a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points. The Gallup findings are based on telephone interviews with 3,379 U.S. adults from Aug. 20-26 with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

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