

Finance & Stewardship

Study ranks Catholics worst at giving

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In one of the most comprehensive studies of U.S. church giving patterns to date, Catholics again came out way on the bottom.

The researchers uncovered a variety of factors that influence giving levels but "no smoking gun" to explain why Catholics give so much less than others, said sociologist Dean Hoge.

The study found that the typical Catholic household gives only \$386 a year to support the church — less than one-fourth the amount that the typical Assemblies of God household gives. Catholic giving is about one-third the amount of Baptist giving or Presbyterian giving and about half as much as the typical Lutheran household gives.

Other studies in recent years have reported similar Catholic-Protestant discrepancies, but most have been based on telephone surveys rather than studies of the actual finances of congregations.

The new study was based on written surveys of more than 10,000 church members and the yearly financial reports of 625 congregations around the country, supplemented by data from a Gallup telephone survey.

The two-year study was funded by the Lilly Endowment. Hoge, who headed the study, is a sociologist at The Catholic University of America's Life Cycle Institute and one of the leading figures in Catholic social research over the past two decades.

Results of the study were released in Washington Nov. 4, 1994, as Hoge and fellow researchers delivered a series of reports on it to the Religious Research Association, holding its annual meeting in Albuquerque, N.M.

In an analysis of the influence of individual and institutional factors on levels of giving, the researchers said their data reinforced "past research finding that giving in conservative Protestant churches is higher



than in mainline Protestant churches and both are higher than in Catholic parishes."

One of the most notable institutional differences between Catholic and Protestant churches in the study was parish size. The average Catholic parish had 2,723 members — about nine to 10 times the size of the average congregation in the other four denominations studied.

But when the researchers tested the hypothesis that smaller congregations have higher per-member giving than larger ones, they found it was not true.

"For all denominations except Catholics," they said, "self-reported contributions were slightly higher in larger churches.... In Catholic parishes the levels do not vary by size. The larger size of Catholic parishes compared with Protestant congregations is not an important explanation for lower levels of Catholic giving."

Addressing other possible factors, the researchers said:

- "Feelings of alienation from denominational leadership or from denominational moral teachings are not important" to

levels of giving.

- "The presence of Catholic schools is not a deterrent to Catholic parish giving."

- "Differences in giving are traceable largely to high-education, high-income parishioners. In conservative Protestant churches these people give large amounts, but in Catholic parishes they give little more than other members."

- "Theological differences are important. Evangelical beliefs are associated with higher giving."

- "How members think about giving and plan their giving is important; tithers give much more, and people who plan their giving year by year give more than those who give what they feel they can afford week by week."

- "Feelings among laity that they prefer lay leaders to handle finances are associated with higher giving."

- "The practice of pledging seems to encourage giving in some denominations. Stewardship programs have at least a modest effect."

—On the importance of

increased giving in relation to increased income, the researchers found sharp disparities between the Catholic pattern and the patterns of the Protestant churches studied.

Among all four Protestant groups, families reporting incomes in the range of \$40,000 to \$80,000 a year showed a steady increase in giving for each additional \$10,000 in income.

For Assemblies of God members, annual giving of families with income in the \$40,000-\$50,000 range was a little more than \$3,000 a year; in the \$70,000-\$80,000 range it was more than \$6,000 a year.

Among Baptists, Presbyterians and Lutherans in the same income ranges, the amounts of giving and rates of increase in giving were not as high but were still fairly substantial.

Among Catholics, however, the level of yearly giving peaked at around \$1,200 for those in the \$40,000-\$50,000 income range, then dropped in the next several categories.

At \$50,000-\$60,000 in family income, Catholic giving averaged about \$1,100.

Those who reported family income in the \$60,000-\$70,000 range said they gave less than \$1,000 a year to their church. And the same was true of those who reported income in the \$70,000-\$80,000 range. Only at a yearly family income of \$80,000-\$100,000 did Catholic giving rise back above \$1,000 a year.

Hoge told Catholic News Service that a similar in-depth study was conducted on a smaller scale in 1971 to assess giving patterns among Protestant churches, but this was the first such detailed study of Protestant and Catholic giving.

Since none of the comparative data in the research explained the much lower Catholic giving, he said, the basic answer to that question appears to lie in areas outside the purview of the study, such as Catholic-Protestant differences in "the culture of giving over a long period of time."

Organizations seek more volunteer aid

Several agencies within the Rochester diocese are currently seeking volunteers. These organizations and the volunteer positions available include:

St. Mary's Hospital: To assist the Rochester hospital through volunteer work in the Admitting and Physical Therapy departments and with clerical work. Call Annabelle Pugliese at 716/464-3255.

Catholic Family Center STAR Program: To assist homebound and frail senior citizens in the Rochester area with grocery shopping, friendly visits and rides to doctor offices. Mileage reimbursement is available. Call 716/262-7069.

Catholic Family Center Refugee Resettlement Program: To help welcome and assist newly arrived refugees from around the world. No financial or legal requirements, and knowledge of foreign language not necessary. Call Jim Delaney at 716/262-7074.

St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center: To work with the homeless and working poor as receptionists, data entry clerks, physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, counselors and tutors. The center, 417 South Ave., is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday, as well as from 5-7 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. For information, call Sister Marilyn Pray, SSJ, or Sister Chris Wagner, SSJ, at 716/325-5260.

The Center for Youth Services, Inc.: To provide host homes, serve as phone counselors or assist at an emergency shelter. This Rochester agency offers counseling and crisis intervention for youths and their families, preventive education, and emergency shelter for runaway and homeless youths. Call 716/473-2464.

The Friendly Home: To assist with activities at a senior citizen residential health-care facility in Brighton. Call 716/385-0219.

American Red Cross, Rochester-Monroe County Chapter: A variety of roles are available involving the preparation and delivery of meals for disabled and elderly citizens. Call 716/256-4032.

Hillside Children's Center, Inc.: To serve as a literacy tutor for adults through the Rochester agency's Family Life Education program. Call Sue Conant at 716/654-4496.

Visiting Nurse Service of Rochester and Monroe County, Inc.: To provide comfort, friendship and support for people facing terminal illness. Call Ann Kubiak at 716/787-8315.

Respite Care: To provide relief (10 hours per month) for caregivers of developmentally disabled adults or children in the Rochester area. Call Marilyn Curtis at 716/581-6550.

Bishop

Continued from page 1A

Diocesan Committee on Planned Giving as just one example of how the diocese wants to tap the talent of its lay Catholics.

In fact, the new committee echoes the lay involvement that already marks the Diocesan Stewardship Council, according to James M. Rinefierd, diocesan chief financial officer. Founded in 1989, the Stewardship Council is made up of priests, women religious, and lay Catholics who advise Bishop Clark on diocesan finance, investment, development and capital campaigns.

In a somewhat similar manner, the new Committee on Planned Giving is made up of Catholic lawyers, tax experts, bankers, real estate agents, insurers and other financial

experts who will bring their secular wisdom to bear on behalf of the church's spiritual mission, the bishop said.

"When you're talking about the development of an institution," Bishop Clark said, "you're talking about people's interrelationships with each other."

Part of developing those interrelationships is marrying the interests of donors with the interests of the church, the bishop continued.

During his Miracle of Sharing Campaign presentations, he explained, he will gear his talks to whatever areas potential donors seem most interested in. For example, a lay Catholic interested in the fund being set up for lay Catholic ministry training might ask where lay ministry fits in the church's overall picture.

Bishop Clark said his answer would be, "I think our capacity as a local church to train in an



intelligent fashion, and in an ongoing fashion, gifted qualified lay ministers is critical to our future." To those individuals who still might have questions about the importance of funding lay ministry programs, the bishop said he would stress that lay ministers need the same kind of professional training that the church's ordained ministers have come to expect.

"Ministry is much more than

a pleasant disposition and a nice smile," Bishop Clark said. "It means many, many hours of training."

The bishop dismissed any notion that asking its members to make a greater financial stake in the church's future meant that lay Catholics would unduly interfere with ministerial work.

"They're going to need and expect lots of information," he said. "They don't want to run things, but they want to be heard."

In the end, by promoting planned giving, Bishop Clark said, he and diocesan leaders hope all Catholics, from workers to professionals, will consider using their talent and treasure to serve the church as it enters the next century.

"The Kingdom of God is built up in the marketplace everyday, in the factories and the offices, not just in the churches," he concluded.