

## **Executive Analysis 2 of 4: Issues Raised by the Findings in *The State of Church Giving through 2011: Why Is This Information Important and What Does It Mean for You and Your Communion?***

The data for many communions has been combined with that of others in the analyses in the just-released *The State of Church Giving through 2011: The Kingdom of God, Church Leaders and Institutions, Global Triage Needs, and the Promises of Jesus*, 23<sup>rd</sup> edition (October 2013).

The Executive Summary highlights findings that raise concerns, leading to these four analysis documents.

Having studied these numbers for decades now—this is the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition—we do you no favor to send the information and hope for the best. One observation is that **church leadership in the U.S. has not come to terms with the “age of affluence” in which we live.** For the first time in world history, since World War II, in some societies, including the U.S., the majority of people are no longer living in poverty. Quite the opposite. The majority of people now have far more than they need for basic needs. This has not happened before.

**The church**, in the best position to help church members navigate the potentially treacherous waters of this extra income, **has not provided an authentic alternative to the consumerism that has absorbed these available funds.** As a result, although various news reports indicate Millennials and those on the 2013 Forbes 400 list want to “make a difference” with their giving, the church is apparently not seen as the avenue through which to do so, based on giving and membership trends.

Leaders within the body of Christ observe that the church in the U.S. needs to increase in faithfulness. Consider two quotes presented in chapter 8.

- (On the parable of the wedding banquet, Matt. 22:1-7) “We have the benefit of knowing who Jesus is, that he rose from the dead to forgive our sins and that he has invited us to join him in his great mission to invite people from all nations to the wedding banquet of the King. But even with our greater understanding, we still insult the King, going off instead to pursue our own priorities—our careers, our lifestyles, our social lives, and our happiness—even as the King beckons us. I have no doubt that our King is also enraged ... and heartbroken.” Richard Stearns, World Vision U.S.<sup>1</sup>
- (On world tragedies in the news) “Should we lay the blame at the feet of a compassionate God, who has been sending life-enhancing visions to millions of leaders all over the world? Or should we lay the blame at the feet of a large number of gutless, cowardly leaders who aborted the misery-alleviating visions that God could have blessed wildly had there been the leadership courage to give them birth?” Bill Hybels, at the 2013 Willow Creek Global Leadership Summit<sup>2</sup>

**What should church leaders do in light of these facts?** If church leaders were to embrace the possibilities that God is providing, not only could global needs be met, but also the church in the U.S. could be strengthened. And those outside the church could come to understand better God’s purpose in sending Jesus Christ. We believe that God is calling the church in the U.S. to **address two triage needs:** engaging the remaining unengaged unreached people groups, and helping, in Jesus’ name to reduce global child deaths. While some initiative appears to be moving on the unengaged, unreached people groups, the area of reducing global child deaths needs leadership (see Analysis 4 of 4).

“Anything is possible. Which is exactly what Jesus promised. **The potential, rather than decline, should be the focus of church leaders.** It is important to use the statistics to take the temperature of the church. However, the next step is to evaluate how to get well, not hide under the covers” (*The State of Church Giving through 2011*, p. 162, emphasis added).

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Stearns, *Unfinished* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Schapiro; “Bill Hybels: Leadership Takes Courage to Carry Out God’s Big Visions”; Christian Post; 8/9/2013; <<http://www.christianpost.com/news/bill-hybels-leadership-takes-courage-to-carry-out-gods-big-visions-101874/print.html>>; p. 2 of 8/9/2013 9:04 AM printout.