

Barna Report--National Concern with Financial Worries: How Should the Church Respond?

By Bob Young

A Barna report [barna.org/culture-articles/422-diverse-set-of-national-concerns-topped-by-widespread-economic-worries] released September 13, 2010 found that economic worries top the list of national concerns. The report, based on a national survey, found that economic factors provided a common thread for the most frequently mentioned concerns in a list of more than 40 different national issues. The question asked concerning those things that the national leaders need to address. According to the report, 98% of those interviewed listed at least one issue connected to the economy, including jobs, unemployment, financial stress, the recession, national spending and debt, and taxes. The second and third concerns mentioned most frequently trailed the economic concern significantly—25% mentioned a concern associated with health care and 24% mentioned a concern related to national security.

In the face of such widespread economic concern, how should the church respond? **First**, both the church and we Christians must learn to live within our means. Perhaps there has never been a time in the history of the world when extravagant spending and luxurious living looked “good” on Christians or the church, but such is even less appropriate in today’s economic climate. If ever there was a time for frugality in church budgets and mission works, now is that time. **Second**, a renewed commitment to frugality is also an opportunity to rethink and reestablish the highest priorities of the church. Why does the church exist? Is church for us (those who are already included in God’s spiritual blessings in Christ), or does the church exist as much for outsiders as for insiders? While internal ministry is biblical and a part of the history of the church, the church can never be satisfied with internal ministry only. In the spirit of its Lord and Savior, the church must constantly lift up its eyes to the harvest, seeking the salvation and inclusion of those not yet a part of the Christian community. **Third**, the church has a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the spirit of Jesus by meeting physical needs, at the same time never forgetting that Jesus met physical needs in order to provide a bridge to conversations about the humanity’s deepest spiritual and eternal needs. When the church feeds the hungry but does not intentionally and purposefully share the gospel as part of the process, the result is only satisfied lost souls. **Fourth**, the church must focus anew on mission and ministry activities that are economically practical and sustainable. One ministry seeks to plant new churches by financing “church planting teams” composed of several families. One such plant sent seven families to a new location with a seven year plan. Some quick math will tell you that the plan involved 49 annual salaries. Even given that those sent were able to go for about \$10,000 per year, such a church planting model requires \$500,000 to plant a church. North American church planting teams who plan to work in foreign mission fields may require \$250,000 per year. There’s got to be a better way! (Excuse the grammar!) Hundreds of churches are being planted each year within the larger realm of Christianity with much less financial investment. Mission work must be guided by economic restraint and the principle that we North Americans will not start or establish works that cannot be sustained locally after we depart.