



Methodology:

The Socio-Economic Value of US Religion by State

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Overall Conceptual Framework (see pp. 21-24 for State-level adjustments)

Religion is an active force in the public, professional, and personal lives of many in the US. Safeguards for religious freedom—such as the First Amendment principles of having no established religion and protecting free religious practice—have helped to produce a dynamic religious marketplace, including the ability of each person to have a religion, change religions, or have no religion at all.

A solid body of research has explored the social contributions of religion, which range from increasing civic participation to ministering to spiritual, physical, emotional, economic, and other life needs. Some studies have looked at the social benefits of congregations,² including some that have attempted to quantify the social and volunteering benefits that congregations provide to communities.³ Other studies have looked at the role of local religious groups in promoting education and civic engagement.⁴ Studies have also considered how religious participation and programs help decrease crime and deviance⁵ as well as promote mental health.⁶ And yet other

¹ This methodology is based on our original studies: “The Socio-economic Contribution of Religion to American Society: An Empirical Analysis,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (2016), Volume 12, No. 3; and “Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse,” *Journal of Religion and Health* (2019) 58: 1713-1750.

² Ammerman, Nancy T. 2001. *Doing Good in American Communities: Congregations and Service Organizations Working Together*. Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary; Cnaan, Ram A., with Robert J. Wineburg and Stephanie C. Boddie. 1999. *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership*. New York: Columbia University Press; Chaves, Mark. 1999. “Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of Charitable Choice?” *American Sociological Review* 64: 836-46.

³ Tirrito, Terry, and Toni Cascio. 2003. *Religious Organizations and Community Services: A Social Work Perspective*. Springer Press: NY.

⁴ E.g., Regnerus, Mark D. 2001. “Making the Grade: The Influence of Religion Upon the Academic Performance of Youth in Disadvantaged Communities.” Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society Report No. 3 44: 394-413; Muller, Chandra and Christopher G. Ellison. 2001. “Religious Involvement, Social Capital, and Adolescents’ Academic Progress: Evidence from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.” *Sociological Forces* 34: 155-183.

⁵ Bainbridge, William Sims. 1989. “The Religious Ecology of Deviance.” *American Sociological Review* 54: 288-295; Hummer, Robert A., Richard G. Rogers, Charles B. Nam, and Christopher G. Ellison. 1999. “Religious Involvement and U.S. Adult Mortality.” *Demography* 36: 273-285; Lester, David. 1987. “Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates.” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 127: 685-686.

⁶ Johnson, Byron R., Ralph Brett Tompkins, and Derek Webb. 2002. “Objective Hope—Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations: A Systematic Review of the Literature.” New York: Manhattan Institute for



studies have looked at how involvement in organized religion improves government stability and economic growth, with the primary mechanism being increased social capital and positive civic networks provided through congregational activities.⁷

A recent Supreme Court amicus brief⁸ also catalogues a broad body of research specifically on the positive contributions of faith-based organizations to the health and welfare of hundreds of millions of Americans. These include charities such as the Lutheran Services in America, which cares for six million people annually, or about one in every fifty persons in the US, and Catholic hospitals, which care for one in six US hospital patients. The amicus brief also summarizes studies where faith-based organizations have been found to outperform public counterparts. For instance:

Faith-based elementary and secondary schools make a distinctive contribution to the education of the Nation's children that public schools have been unable to match. In 2015, the combined average SAT score for students from religious schools was 1596 points, or 134 points higher than the average score of 1462 for public school students. [And s]tudents in religious schools are safer than students in public schools, as measured by fewer instances of violent crime and bullying. A higher percentage of students in religious schools report feeling safe from attack or harm in school compared to their public school peers.⁹

Of course, not every religious organization or group has the same level of impact, and not all of the impact is positive. Indeed, there are high profile cases where people in religious authority or acting in the name of religion have engaged in destructive activities. These negative impacts

Policy Research, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society; Fagan, Patrick F. 2006. "Why Religion Matters Even More: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability." Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation.

⁷ Also see Putnam, Robert. 2000 [1990]. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Fukuyama, Francis. 2001. "Social Capital, Civil Society and Development." *Third World Quarterly* 22: 7-20; Schwadel, Philip. 2002. "Testing the Promise of the Churches: Income Inequality in the Opportunity to Learn Civic Skills in Christian Congregations." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41:3: 565-575; Zak, Paul J. and Stephen Knack. 2001. "Trust and Growth." *The Economic Journal* 111: 295-321.

⁸ Picarello, Anthony R. Jr., Jeffrey Hunter Moon, Michael F. Moses, and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2016. "Brief *Amicus Curiae* of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance; World Vision, Inc.; Catholic Relief Services; Family Research Council; Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities; Thomas More Society; and the Cardinal Newman Society in Support of Petitioners and Supporting Reversal.", <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Zubik-USCCB-brief.pdf>.

⁹ Picarello, Anthony R. Jr., Jeffrey Hunter Moon, Michael F. Moses, and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2016. "Brief *Amicus Curiae* of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance; World Vision, Inc.; Catholic Relief Services; Family Research Council; Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities; Thomas More Society; and the Cardinal Newman Society in Support of Petitioners and Supporting Reversal.", <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Zubik-USCCB-brief.pdf>.



range from such things as the abuse of children by some clergy,¹⁰ cases of fraud,¹¹ and places of worship becoming recruitment sites for violent extremism,¹² all of which detract from the other positive values of religious institutions. Of course, such serious ills affect a wide variety of institutions ranging from major public universities,¹³ to publicly traded companies,¹⁴ to online public chatrooms.¹⁵ And while negative news makes news, both sides are important to understand clearly.

Recent studies, such as Paul Numrich and Elfriede Wedam,¹⁶ provide a more nuanced analysis of the community impact of congregations. In their study of fifteen congregations in the Chicago area—including Catholic parishes, Protestant churches, Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, and a Hindu temple—they concluded that religion has a significant role in shaping postindustrial cities, although the impact varies from congregation to congregation. They also provide a helpful framework for analysis of the different types and levels of impact.

In a separate quantitative study on the effect of shutting down a congregation in an inner city, Kinney and Combs found that this precedes and contributes to the socioeconomic collapse of the community in which the congregation is located.¹⁷ Specifically, their study found that declines in neighborhood viability were significantly related to the closure of congregations characterized by *bridging social capital*, i.e., congregations that connected heterogeneous groups and bridged diversity.¹⁸

Understanding the socioeconomic value of religion to American society is especially important in the present era characterized by disaffiliation from organized religion. The Pew Research Center study “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” for instance, reports that the number of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated now stands at one-fifth of the adult population, while one-third of adults under thirty are unaffiliated.¹⁹ Of the total unaffiliated, nearly 6 percent of the US population identifies as atheist or agnostic, while 14 percent claim no particular religious affiliation.²⁰ The Pew study found that a majority of the religiously unaffiliated say that they are ambivalent toward

¹⁰ Cafardi, Nicholas P. 2008. *Before Dallas: The U.S. Bishops' Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse of Children*. New York: Paulist Press

¹¹ De Sanctis, Fausto Martin. 2015. *Churches, Temples, and Financial Crimes: A Judicial Perspective of the Abuse of Faith*. New York: Springer.

¹² Neumann, Peter R. 2008. *Joining al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe*. London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies.

¹³ Moushey, Bill, and Robert Dvorchak. 2013. *Game Over: Jerry Sandusky, Penn State, and the Culture of Silence*. New York: HarperCollins.

¹⁴ Gitlow, Abraham L. 2005. *Corruption in Corporate America: Who is Responsible? who Will Protect the Public Interest?* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

¹⁵ Erelle, Anna. 2015. *In the Skin of a Jihadist: Inside Islamic State's Recruitment Networks*. London: HarperCollins.

¹⁶ Numrich, Paul D., and Elfriede Wedam. 2015. *Religion and Community in the New Urban America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Kinney, Nancy T., and Todd Bryan Combs. 2015. "Changes in religious ecology and socioeconomic correlates for neighborhoods in a metropolitan region." *Journal of Urban Affairs*.

¹⁸ Kinney, Nancy T., and Todd Bryan Combs. 2015. "Changes in religious ecology and socioeconomic correlates for neighborhoods in a metropolitan region." *Journal of Urban Affairs*.

¹⁹ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

²⁰ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.



religious institutions and some express negative views of religious organizations. For instance, Pew found that a majority of the religiously unaffiliated think that religious organizations are too focused on such things as money and power, and on rules and politics.²¹

At the same time, the Pew study also found that seven in ten religiously affiliated people believe that congregations and religious institutions contributed some or a great deal to solving social problems.²² However, only 45 percent of the religiously unaffiliated expressed the same.²³ People who identified their religion as “nothing in particular” were evenly split on whether religious institutions were instrumental in solving social problems,²⁴ while 63 percent of atheists and agnostics said that religious institutions contributed not much or nothing at all to solving social problems.²⁵

Given the division of opinion on religion’s contribution to American society, this present study seeks to shed light on the topic by making an estimate of religion’s socioeconomic value to society. Indeed, we should know if the decline in religion is likely to have negative economic consequences.

In what follows, we provide two estimates of the value of faith to US society. The first takes into account the fair market value of congregational economic activity, social services and impact. The second is based on the annual household incomes of America’s religiously affiliated population.

ESTIMATE 1: CONGREGATIONS

To estimate the finances and activities of US congregations, we used two nationally representative data sources that included data on multiple faith traditions running the gamut from Adventists to Zoroastrians.

To quantify US congregational finances and activities, we used the National Congregations Study cumulative dataset (1998, 2006–2007, 2012) archived at the Association of Religion Data Archives.²⁶ The National Congregations Study “fills a void in the sociological study of

²¹ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

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²³ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

²⁴ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

²⁵ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

²⁶ See <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NCSIII.asp>. The data were gathered as part of the General Social Survey (GSS) interviews. But instead of a sample of individuals, these interviews were of a nationally representative sample of congregations via a fifty-minute interview with one key informant, usually a clergyperson, from each congregation. The GSS is a face-to-face interview conducted by experienced and well-trained interviewers; in 1998, 2006–2007, and 2012, interviewers were instructed to glean from respondents as much locational information about their congregations as possible. The 1998 and 2012 NCS data were collected by the same interviewers who collected data from GSS respondents; in 2006–2007, some of the data were also collected by phone-bank interviewers.



congregations by providing . . . data that can be used to draw a nationally aggregate picture of congregations."²⁷ The 2012 NCS also includes an oversample of Hispanic congregations.

In order to scale the results to actual dollar and numeric figures, we used the 2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS) conducted by representatives of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB).²⁸ RCMS 2010 provides data on the number of congregations, members, adherents, and attendees for the 236 religious bodies and denominations participating in the study. Study participants included 217 Christian denominations, associations, or communions (including Latter-day Saints, Messianic Jews, and some Unitarian/Universalist groups); counts of Jain, Shinto, Sikh, Tao, and National Spiritualist Association congregations; counts of congregations and individuals for Bahá'í; three Buddhist groupings; four Hindu groupings; four Jewish groupings; Muslims; and Zoroastrians. The study also went to special efforts to identify and include data from several religious bodies that have not traditionally participated or have been underrepresented in similar past studies, including improved coverage of predominantly African American religious bodies. The 236 groups surveyed have among them 344,894 congregations and 150,686,156 adherents.²⁹

Combining these two sets of data make it possible, for instance, to estimate the finances for US congregations nationwide as well as the number of congregations engaging in certain activities and ministries. For instance, among the 4,071 congregations surveyed in the 2012 National Congregations Study, the average annual income from all sources was \$242,910 per congregation (Table 1, data point 1). Of this, \$216,143 comes from individuals' donations, dues, or contributions (Table 1, data point 2). Multiplying this figure by the 344,894 congregations identified by the RCMS study produces an estimated annual income from individual donations for US congregations of \$74.5 billion (\$74,546,330,721).

Table 1. Nationally Representative Data on Activities of US Congregations (Multiple Faiths), ordered by amount or frequency of occurrence

Italicized data points indicate activities of congregations across multiple faith traditions that provide for civic life and social cohesion above and beyond providing for the spiritual lives of congregants.

Data point	Income and Spending	Avg. per congregation*	Total amount across 344,894 congregations*
1	Congregation's Annual Income	\$242,910	\$83,778,191,193
2	Amount of Income from Individual's Donations, Dues, Contributions	\$216,143	\$74,546,330,721

²⁷ Chaves, Mark, Mary Ellen Konieczny, Kraig Beyerlein, and Emily Barman. 1999. "The National Congregations Study: Background, Methods, and Selected Results." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38: 458-476. (Chaves et al. 1999, p.460)

²⁸ See <http://www.rcms2010.org/> and <http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/>.

²⁹ For more information on the RCMS 2010 study and its methodology, see http://www.rcms2010.org/images/2010_US_Religion_Census_Introduction.pdf.



3	Total Money Spent on Social Programs 2012	\$26,781	\$9,236,699,335
4	Total Money Spent on Social Programs 2006	\$9,190	\$3,169,472,392
5	Total Money Spent on Social Programs 1998	\$6,880	\$2,372,839,680
6	Amount Given to Other Religious Organizations	\$2,997	\$1,033,799,071
7	Government Grants, Contracts, Fees for Social Service Projects	\$732	\$252,327,899
8	Amount Received from Foundations, Businesses, United Way	\$354	\$122,137,312

Sources: Questions are from the National Congregations Study (NCS) cumulative dataset (1998, 2006-07, 2012) archived at the Association of Religion Data Archive; overall total of congregations from the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS) conducted by representatives of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB). Data points are for the cumulative average across the years of the NCS, where available. Where not, the most recent year of data is prioritized.

For this study we weighted the data by WTA3CNGD to have results representing the average congregation's perspective.

* Dollar figures and total numbers are reported in detail based on calculations from the dataset; the actual precision is less, but is 95% likely to be within the survey's margin of error of +/-3%. Figures may not total due to rounding of decimals.

As a way to check the plausibility of this figure, we can compare it with the overall sum donated by individuals to religion in 2012. According to the Giving USA foundation, American individuals donated a total of \$101.5 billion to religious organizations.³⁰ Thus, the \$74.5 billion estimate (three-quarters of the total) seems plausible considering that religious congregations tend to encourage their members to channel their giving through their local congregation. The total income of \$83.8 billion (Table 1, data point 1) takes into account other revenue sources including endowments and grants.

The research of Cnaan and colleagues over the years³¹ describes the process by which religious congregations have positive impacts on communities. They argue that communities socially and economically benefit from the *halo effect*³² of having the stable, attractive force of a congregation in a community, providing a center for education, childcare, social events, charity,

³⁰ See <http://money.cnn.com/2013/06/21/pf/charitable-donations/>.

³¹ Cnaan, Ram A. 2015. "Measuring Social Valuation: The Case of Local Religious Congregations." Presented at the G20 Interfaith Summit 2015, Istanbul, Turkey, November 17. Internet: <http://www.iclrs.org/content/events/116/2707.pdf>.

Cnaan, Ram A., Stephanie C. Boddie, Charlene C. McGrew and Jennifer J. Kang. 2006. *The Other Philadelphia Story: How Local Congregations Support Quality of Life in Urban America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Cnaan, Ram A., Tuome Forrest, Joseph Carlsmith, and Kelsey Karsh. 2013. "If you don't count it, it doesn't count: A pilot study of valuing urban congregations," *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* 10: 3-36.

Cnaan, Ram A., with Robert J. Wineburg and Stephanie C. Boddie. 1999. *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³² The halo effect is socio-economic benefits religion provides in addition to spiritual contributions. See Cnaan, R. A., An, S., & Forrest, T. The halo effect: Congregational contribution to their local economy. Annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Indianapolis, IN: October 31-November 2, 2014.



and job training, among other functions.³³ Part of this contribution includes that congregations also provide a sizeable number of jobs. Most congregations have fulltime or part time paid staff ranging from pastors and music directors to maintenance and operational staff. For instance, there are paid youth ministers in more than an estimated 124,000 congregations nationwide.³⁴

Cnaan and colleagues also catalogue other halo effects ranging from being a magnet attracting visitors for such things as performances, lectures, and weddings (and the local spending made related to these events), to using the green space around congregational buildings for recreation and repose, to attracting people to view a congregation's architecture and art.³⁵ Looking at the combined data from the National Congregations Study and the RCMS (described above), we can see that such halo magnet effects are perhaps surprisingly common, with an estimated 116,919 congregations nationwide reporting that they attract visitors to view their architecture and art.³⁶ By comparison, there are only 35,144 museums in the US, according to a 2014 estimate by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).³⁷ This means that museum-worthy, visitor-attracting places of worship outnumber America's museums by more than 3.3 times.

The combined National Congregations Study and RCMS data also allows us to see how many congregations do certain social ministries, such as have groups to provide support for persons with HIV-AIDS.³⁸ The data show that 7.5 percent of congregations report having groups, meetings, classes, or events specifically focused on providing support, such as food, housing, personal items, or pastoral care to persons living with HIV-AIDS. That means that 25,867 congregations are engaged in some form of active ministry to help people living with HIV-AIDS. In terms of the portion of the US population living with HIV infection, this could be considered a higher percentage than expected. Currently, according to the CDC, 1.2 million people live with HIV, or 0.4 percent of the US population.³⁹ Of course, these ministries do not reach all HIV positive people, but numerically, this is the equivalent of one congregational HIV-AIDS ministry for every forty-six people who are HIV positive.

Table 2 repeats from Table 1 the income and spending data of congregations from the National Congregations Study (NCS) scaled to actual dollar and numeric figures by using the 2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS). However, Table 2 greatly expands the data in order to provide a wealth of additional congregational information including estimates of numbers of people involved in classes and programs and types of activities that minister to the

³³ Cnaan, Ram A. 2015. "Measuring Social Valuation: The Case of Local Religious Congregations." Presented at the G20 Interfaith Summit 2015, Istanbul, Turkey, November 17. Internet: <http://www.iclrs.org/content/events/116/2707.pdf>

³⁴ Infra Table 2, data point 52.

³⁵ Infra Table 2, data point 57.

³⁶ Infra Table 2, data point 57

³⁷ IMLS is the US agency that is the primary source of federal funding for the nation's museums and libraries. See <https://www.imls.gov/news-events/news-releases/government-doubles-official-estimate-there-are-35000-active-museums-us>

³⁸ Infra Table 2, data point 89.

³⁹ See <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/statistics/>.



social needs of communities (identified in the table by italics). This list is illustrative, not exhaustive.⁴⁰

The data in Table 2 show the types of social and community impact that Cnaan and colleagues have taken into account when estimating the value provided by congregations to a community. To provide a ballpark estimate of the real value of such halo effects nationally is possible by drawing on Cnaan’s most recent work from 2015, which is described in the section after the table. Indeed, these data provide context and support for this study’s second estimate of faith’s socioeconomic contribution to American society by giving an overview of the types of activities that congregations do beyond worship services, many of which contribute to a robust civic society. These include some specifically religion-related activities, such as religious education classes, but they also include a large number of community activities ranging from recruiting volunteers for outside projects (data point 19) to activities to support military veterans and their families (data point 61). This information sheds light on the social contributions resulting from revenues of religious congregations.

In addition, congregations provide community and social services by fielding an estimated 7.6 million volunteers in social service programs (data point 11). These activities and the volunteers that run them tend to be collaborative endeavors with other groups in society, promoting social cohesion through broader civic engagement beyond the congregations’ doors. Indeed, nearly three-in-four congregations, or almost 257,000 congregations nationwide, engage in collaboration with other groups and organizations on social programs (data point 25). In fact, almost all congregations (93 percent) recruit volunteers for outside projects (data point 19).

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⁴⁰ The full list of questions included in the three waves of the National Congregations Study with weighted frequencies can be found here: http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/NCSIII_CB.asp.



8	Amount Received from Foundations, Businesses, United Way	\$354	\$122,137,312
	Numbers of People Involved in Classes and Programs	Avg. per Congregation	Total People, Groups, or Programs
9	Number of Adults Attending Weekly Religious Classes	35.6	12,271,329
10	Number of Children 12-and-Under Attending Weekly Religious Classes	34.2	11,802,273
11	<i>Number of Congregants that Volunteered, Social Service Programs</i>	22.2	7,646,300
12	Number of Members Receiving Help from Congregation	17.6	6,077,032
13	Number of Teens Attending Weekly Religious Classes	15.3	5,259,634
14	Number of Adult Volunteers	15.1	5,197,553
15	Number Religious Education Classes Meeting Once a Month or More	6.9	2,362,524
16	<i>Number of Social Service Programs Sponsored</i>	4.7	1,621,002
17	Number of Regular Choir, Musical Performance Groups	1.6	562,177
18	<i>Groups for Musical, Theatrical Performance (not choirs)</i>	93.0%	320,751
19	<i>Recruiting Volunteers for Outside Projects</i>	92.8%	320,062
20	<i>Worship Service Advertised Volunteer Opportunities</i>	92.8%	320,062
21	Religious Clergy Has Higher Education	89.8%	309,715
22	Congregation Had a Visiting Speaker	81.0%	279,364
23	Congregants Greet During Service	80.2%	276,605
24	Congregation Followed Up With Visitors	78.7%	271,432
25	<i>Congregation Collaborates on 4 Most Important Social Programs</i>	74.5%	256,946
26	Congregation Groups Meet Monthly for Religious, Social, Recreational Activity	74.3%	256,256
27	Congregation has Filed for 501(c)(3) Status	72.0%	248,324
28	Groups for Cleaning, and Building Maintenance	71.2%	245,565
29	<i>Joint Worship Service with Another Congregation</i>	68.2%	235,218
30	<i>Visiting Speaking Clergy from Another Congregation</i>	66.0%	227,630
31	Members Serve on Committees, Attended Meetings	64.5%	222,457
32	Worship Service had Play Production	63.4%	218,663
33	Congregation has Teen Camps, Retreats, Conferences	63.3%	218,318
34	Congregation has Organized Youth Group	62.2%	214,524
35	Group for Socializing, Fellowship	61.6%	212,455
36	Facilities Accommodate the Disabled	56.0%	193,141



37	Congregation Owns Copyrighted Music	51.1%	176,241
38	<i>Worship Building Used for Non-Congregational Purposes</i>	50.0%	172,447
39	<i>Congregation has Teens Plan, Present Non-Worship Service Events</i>	49.9%	172,102
40	Worship Service Has Focus on Children	48.3%	166,584
41	<i>Groups to Plan or Conduct Community Needs</i>	47.7%	164,514
42	<i>Congregation Placed Paid Ad in Newspaper</i>	44.8%	154,513
43	<i>Group that Serves, Volunteers with People of Another Faith</i>	42.7%	147,270
44	<i>Groups to Attend Musical, Theatrical Outside Events</i>	41.9%	144,511
45	Avg. Number of Adult Congregants Participating in Leadership Role	40.6%	140,165
46	Worship Service Has Teen Participation	39.9%	137,613
47	Groups to Train New Religious Education Teachers	39.6%	136,578
48	<i>Groups to Discuss Parenting Issues</i>	39.2%	135,198
49	<i>Groups to Encourage Volunteer Activity</i>	38.7%	133,474
50	<i>Groups for People Struggling with Drug, Alcohol Abuse</i>	37.6%	129,680
51	<i>Groups for Couples on Enriching, Improving Their Marriages</i>	36.2%	124,852
52	Congregation's Youth Minister is Paid	36.0%	124,162
53	<i>Worship Service Had Hired Singers, Musicians</i>	35.9%	123,817
54	<i>Group Specifically for Women</i>	35.8%	123,472
55	<i>Clergy Holds Multiple Jobs</i>	35.8%	123,472
56	<i>Groups to Help Unemployed People</i>	35.0%	120,713
57	<i>Visitors Come to View Building's Architecture, Artwork</i>	33.9%	116,919
58	<i>Group Travels in US to Help the Needy</i>	32.4%	111,746
59	Groups for Physical Healing	32.4%	111,746
60	<i>Activities to Promote Physical Fitness</i>	29.1%	100,364
61	<i>Activities to Support Military Veterans and Their Families</i>	27.3%	94,156
62	<i>Groups to Teach Personal Finance Management</i>	26.5%	91,397
63	Congregation Conducted, Used Survey of Community	25.6%	88,293
64	<i>Congregation Has Health-Focused Programs</i>	24.8%	85,534
65	<i>Groups to Discuss, Learn About a Different Religion</i>	23.9%	82,430
66	<i>Groups for People with Mental Illness</i>	22.9%	78,981
67	Congregation Has Teens Serve on Governing Boards	22.4%	77,256
68	<i>Group for Food</i>	19.7%	67,944



69	<i>Congregation Affiliated with Community Organizing Group</i>	19.2%	66,220
70	<i>Program: Home Building, Repair, Maintenance</i>	18.1%	62,426
71	<i>Program: Providing Clothing, Blankets, Rummage Sales</i>	17.3%	59,667
72	<i>Groups to Discuss People's Problems, Concerns with Work</i>	17.1%	58,977
73	<i>Groups to Discuss Societal Race Relations</i>	16.3%	56,218
74	<i>Groups for Self-Help, Such as AA</i>	16.2%	55,873
75	<i>Worship Building Used for Non-Congregational Rehearsals, Performances</i>	16.0%	55,183
76	<i>Congregation Started, Planted New Congregation</i>	15.4%	53,114
77	<i>Number of Paid Employees Who Spent More than 25% of Their Work Time on Social Service Projects</i>	14.0%	48,285
78	<i>Group for Helping the Needy</i>	13.9%	47,940
79	<i>Program: Non-Religious Education</i>	13.6%	46,906
80	<i>Groups to Encourage People to Register to Vote</i>	12.7%	43,802
81	<i>Group for Senior Citizens</i>	12.2%	42,077
82	<i>Program: Homeless or Transient</i>	11.8%	40,697
83	<i>Group for Fine or Performing Arts</i>	10.8%	37,249
84	<i>Shares Worship Building with Other Congregations</i>	9.7%	33,455
85	<i>Groups to Offer Services to Immigrants</i>	9.5%	32,765
86	<i>Group for Fundraising</i>	8.7%	30,006
87	<i>Groups Meet to Prevent Transmission of HIV, AIDS</i>	8.6%	29,661
88	<i>Donates to Organizations that Primarily Help People with HIV, AIDS</i>	7.6%	26,212
89	<i>Groups Provide Support to Persons with HIV, AIDS</i>	7.5%	25,867
90	<i>Groups Meet to Raise Awareness of HIV, AIDS</i>	7.4%	25,522
91	<i>Established Separate Non-Profit Org. to Conduct Human Services, Outreach</i>	7.4%	25,522
92	<i>Groups to Discuss Pollution, Environmental Issues</i>	7.4%	25,522
93	<i>Worship Building Used for Non-Congregational Art Exhibits</i>	5.6%	19,314
94	<i>Congregations with Elementary or High Schools</i>	5.4%	18,624
95	<i>Program: Disaster Relief</i>	5.3%	18,279
96	<i>Programs to Serve Persons with HIV, AIDS</i>	5.3%	18,279
97	<i>Program for Cleaning Highways or Parks</i>	5.2%	17,934
98	<i>Group for Vacation, Summer Bible schools</i>	5.0%	17,245
99	<i>Groups to Teach Congregants English</i>	4.8%	16,555
100	<i>Program: Substance Abuse</i>	4.4%	15,175
101	<i>Group for Couples, Marriage Preparation Classes</i>	4.0%	13,796



102	<i>Group for Visiting Shut-Ins, Incarcerated Individual</i>	3.5%	12,071
103	<i>Program: Habitat for Humanity</i>	3.2%	11,037
104	<i>Group for Bingo, Cards, Game Playing</i>	3.2%	11,037
105	<i>Group for Festivals, Bazaars, Craft Fairs, or Other Celebrations</i>	3.1%	10,692
106	<i>Joint Worship Service with Jewish Congregation</i>	3.1%	10,692
107	<i>Program Serves Victims of Rape, Domestic Violence</i>	2.1%	7,243
108	<i>Group for Sewing</i>	2.1%	7,243
109	<i>Group for Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One</i>	2.0%	6,898
110	<i>Program: Prisoners, People in Trouble with the Law and their Families</i>	2.0%	6,898
111	<i>% of Adult Congregants who Moved to the US in Past 5 years</i>	2.0%	6,898
112	<i>Group for Racial/Ethnic Relations</i>	1.6%	5,518
113	<i>Joint Worship Service with Muslims</i>	1.5%	5,173
114	<i>Group for Helping people with Substance Abuse Problems</i>	1.2%	4,139
115	<i>Program: St. Vincent de Paul</i>	0.5%	1,724

Sources: Questions are from the National Congregations Study (NCS) cumulative dataset (1998, 2006–07, 2012) archived at the Association of Religion Data Archive; overall total of congregations from the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS) conducted by representatives of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB). Data points are for the cumulative average across the years of the NCS, where available. Where not, the most recent year of data is prioritized.

For this study we weighted the data by WTA3CNGD to have results representing the average congregation's perspective.

* Dollar figures and total numbers are reported in detail based on calculations from the dataset; the actual precision is less, but is 95% likely to be within the survey's margin of error of +/-3%. Figures may not total due to rounding of decimals.

Valuation of Congregations: A Summary

Cnaan (2015) reports on the estimated economic value to communities of ninety congregations in three cities: Philadelphia (40), Chicago (30), and Fort Worth (20).⁴¹ His team interviewed clergy, other leaders, and program directors where needed to collect data on six ways congregations provide value to the communities in which they are located.⁴²

First, Cnaan's study estimated the value of the positive individual impact provided by a congregation's leaders who provide support to individuals, couples and families. These include activities that (a) promote health and well-being, (b) mitigate negative costs such as legal troubles or lost productivity, (c) increase benefits to the local communities including employment, which also includes paying employment taxes, and (d) investment in family and children.⁴³ As Cnaan

⁴¹ Cnaan, Ram A. 2015. "Measuring Social Valuation: The Case of Local Religious Congregations." Presented at the G20 Interfaith Summit 2015, Istanbul, Turkey, November 17. Internet: <http://www.iclrs.org/content/events/116/2707.pdf>.

⁴² Op cit.

⁴³ Op cit.



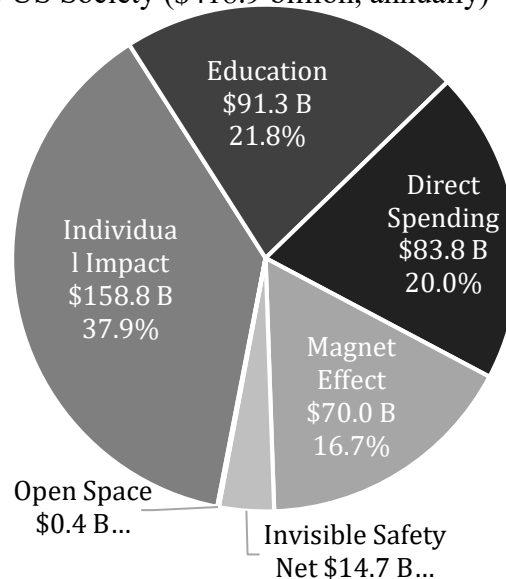
notes, such activities are associated with decreased drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, domestic violence, and other personal problems.⁴⁴ Second, the study estimated the direct spending of congregations that contribute to the local economy, including buying goods and services, employing local residents and using local vendors. Third, the study estimated the “Magnet Effect,” including the value of hosting weddings, funerals, artistic performances, lectures, and so on that draw out of town visitors. These Magnet Effects are tangible activities, such as visitors spending money at local restaurants and other small businesses. Fourth, Cnaan’s study estimated the value of schools and daycare centers associated with congregations. Fifth, the study estimated the value of “Open Space,” i.e., a congregation’s outdoor space often provides a garden and other features that contribute to increasing community aesthetics, lowering storm water runoff treatment costs, and offering recreational and leisure possibilities. And sixth, the study estimated the invisible safety net provide by congregations involving thousands of volunteer and provision of in-kind support that augments the city’s network of social services.

The study found that for the ninety congregations from Chicago, Fort Worth, and Philadelphia, the average distribution of contributions was as follows:

- Individual Impact (37.9 percent)
- Education (21.8 percent)
- Direct Spending (20 percent)
- Magnet Effect (16.7 percent)
- Invisible Safety Net (3.5 percent)
- Open Space (0.1 percent)⁴⁵

The Cnaan study did not find significant differences between the results for the congregations in Chicago, Fort Worth, or Philadelphia, reporting similar overall average contribution to their local economy. While the limitation of the study is that it focused only on urban congregations, there is some indication from the results that they match the national profile of congregations. For instance, the Cnaan study found that on average the number of different social programs per congregation was 4.73. This

Chart 1. Religious Congregations' Value to US Society (\$418.9 billion, annually)



(Figures may not total due to rounding of decimals.)

Source: The Socio-economic Contribution of

⁴⁴ Op cit.

⁴⁵ See *infra* chart 1.

is almost identical to the findings from the National Congregations Study (NCS), which was 4.7 social service programs.⁴⁶

Applying the Methodology to a National Valuation

Applying the above findings to a national estimate, we begin by taking the cash revenues of congregations as roughly the equivalent of the direct spending of congregations. This is appropriate because, as the norm, congregations pretty much spend what comes in.⁴⁷ Taking then \$83,778,191,193 (Table 2, data point 1) as the direct spending of congregations nationwide, which we assume based on Cnaan's study to be 20 percent of the total value of congregational activities, we can then allot the other 80 percent proportionally (as shown in Chart 1): Individual Impact (37.9 percent), \$158.8 billion; Education (21.8 percent), \$91.3 billion; Magnet Effect (16.7 percent), \$70.0 billion; Invisible Safety Net (3.5 percent), \$14.7 billion; Open Space (0.1 percent), \$0.4 billion; Total (100 percent), \$418.9 billion. Using this approach, we come up with a more realistic value of the multifaceted services provided by congregations, including education ranging from preschool and schools to seminars and conferences to job and marriage courses.

New Valuation of Groups for People Struggling with Drug, Alcohol Abuse

Not only does faith offer personal and social resources helping people avoid and/or recover from substance abuse, its impact is often made manifest at the local congregational level, as places of worship host spiritual or religious 12-step type fellowship meetings. We now assess the fair market value of community services provided by religious organizations through nearly 130,000 congregational substance abuse recovery programs (Table 2, data point 50), which was not specifically measured in Cnaan's "individual impact" category. We do so drawing on the same methodology used by the White House (2017) to put a dollar value on America's opioid crisis.

White House Valuation of Opioid Crisis Based on Value of a Statistical Life (VSL)

Within the Executive Office of the President, the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) is charged with offering the President objective economic advice on the formulation of both domestic and international economic policy using the best data available. The CEA chairpersons require Senate confirmation. In November 2017, the CEA issued a report (Council of Economic Advisers, 2017) offering a new valuation of the adverse impact of the opioid crisis on the American economy, titled "The Underestimated Cost of the Opioid Crisis." The brief 14-page report changed the national discussion on the crisis by putting a \$504 billion value on the human cost of substance abuse. While there is no perfect methodology for estimating the cost of a lost or ruined human life,

⁴⁶ Infra Table 2, data point 16.

⁴⁷ See "How Churches Spend Their Money," Christianity Today, August 28, 2014. Internet: www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2014/august/how-churches-spend-their-money.html.



over the years researchers have reached a consensus that economic valuations of a fatality, i.e., the value of a statistical life (i.e., VSL) is in millions of dollars (Viscusi, 2013).⁴⁸ VSL is used by various government agencies to estimate the economic cost-benefit value of certain risk-reduction policies, such as the economic value of lowering speed limits to reduce traffic fatalities or building a levee to prevent catastrophic flooding or, in this case, spending money on substance abuse prevention to save lives.⁴⁹ The 2017 CEA report reviewed research on the range of empirical estimates of the VSL used by the federal government regulatory and health agencies in order to estimate the economic cost of the opioid crisis (Robinson & Hammitt, 2016; Viscusi, 2015; Viscusi & Aldy, 2003; Viscusi & Masterman, 2017). The CEA report (2017, p. 4) identified three federal agencies that have issued formal guidance on VSL to inform their rulemaking and regulatory decision-making: the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).⁵⁰

In the end, the White House presented cost estimates under three alternative VSL assumptions: low (\$5.4 million), middle (\$9.6 million), and high (\$13.4 million), based on the U.S. DOT and similar to those used by HHS. Thus, their low fatality cost estimate of \$221.6 billion is the product of the adjusted number of fatalities (i.e., 41,033) and the VSL assumption of \$5.4 million. Their fatality cost estimates thus range from a low of \$221.6 billion to a high of \$549.8 billion, which is the product of fatalities and the high estimate. Their estimates also take into account that opioid fatalities are more common among younger age groups, as also shown in the same table under the age-dependent VSL assumption. Finally, the CEA estimate includes non-fatality costs in addition to the cost of fatalities each year. They estimated those costs by using the estimates of Florence et al. (2016) to calculate a measure of per-person costs of opioid misuse among those who did not die within the year and then multiplying that per-person cost by the number of individuals with an opioid use disorder in 2015. Florence et al.'s (2016) estimates of increased costs due to prescription opioid misuse were \$58.0 billion (according to the 2015 value

⁴⁸ VSL is sometimes misleadingly referred to simply as “value of life.” This is erroneous because monetization does not actually place a “value” on individual lives because the value of any individual’s life cannot be expressed in monetary terms. The sole purpose is to help estimate the likely statistical benefits of a regulatory action that reduces the risks that people face.

⁴⁹ The Office of Management and Budget (n.d., p. 10) advises U.S. government agencies against the overly simplistic rationale for the monetization of health and safety benefits, such as the avoided cost of illness or avoided lost earnings. Instead, the measure should capture pain and suffering and other quality-of-life effects including, but not limited to, the private demand for prevention of the risk and the net financial externalities associated with the risk, such as net changes in public medical costs and any net changes in economic production that are not experienced by the target population.

⁵⁰ The U.S. DOT (2016b) uses a value of \$9.6 million (according to the 2015 value of dollar) for each expected fatality reduction, with sensitivity analysis conducted at alternative values of \$5.4 million and \$13.4 million. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) (2016) current guidance calls for using a VSL estimate of \$10.1 million (according to the 2015 value of dollar). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (2016) suggests using the range of estimates from Robinson and Hammitt (2016), a low of \$4.4 million to a high of \$14.3 million with a central value of \$9.4 million (according to the 2015 value of dollar).



of dollar), broken down as follows: \$29.4 billion: increased health care and substance abuse treatment costs; \$7.8 billion: increased criminal justice costs; and \$20.8 billion: reduced productivity among those who do not die of an overdose.

The CEA took this nonfatal total cost of \$58.0 billion and divided it by the 1.9 million individuals who had a prescription opioid disorder in 2013 (the reference year of Florence et al.’s (2016) study), resulting in an average cost of approximately \$30,000 per person. The CEA applied that average cost to the 2.4 million people with opioid disorders in 2015, resulting in a total cost of \$72.3 billion for nonfatal costs (the CEA also included heroin disorders as well as prescription opioid misuse).

Valuation of Congregation-based Substance Abuse Recovery Support Programs

Using the White House CEA’s methodology as a blueprint, we can estimate an economic valuation of congregation-based abuse recovery support programs’ contribution to American society and its economy. Detailed data are not available for the nearly 130,000 congregational substance abuse recovery groups. However, data are available for A.A., which has been conducting surveys of their members every three to four years since 1968 (Alcoholic Anonymous, 1970). A.A. conducts these surveys to keep members informed of the current membership trends. As a proxy, the A.A.’s surveys, in combination with other data summarized in Table 3, are particularly useful for making valuation of religious and spiritual substance abuse recovery programs, mainly because many A.A. groups meet in churches and other faith congregations.⁵¹

Table 3. Data Used in Proxy Valuation of Religious and Spiritual Substance Abuse Recovery Programs Held in Congregations

Data	Source
Length of sobriety	Alcoholic Anonymous (2014)
Risk of relapse over time	Dennis, Foss, and Scott (2007)
Age structure of A.A. members	Alcoholic Anonymous (2014)
Mortality rates	National Vital Statistics Reports (Xu et al., 2018)
Relative mortality risk of people with alcohol use disorder	Laramée et al. (2015)
Total membership	Alcoholics Anonymous (2018a)
Numbers of groups	Alcoholics Anonymous (2018a)
VSL	CEA (2017)
Non-fatality costs of addiction	CEA (2017)

⁵¹ While A.A. does not provide data on the number of groups meeting in congregations, they do report on the over 66,000 A.A. groups in the United States and Canada, 61,904 of which are in the United States (Alcoholic Anonymous, 2018a), around 1,000 are in treatment facilities, and over 1,400 are in correctional institutions (Alcoholic Anonymous, 2018b, p. 3). The remainder are hosted in congregations, community centers, etc.



We will now go through a series of steps leading to a valuation of the nearly 130,000 congregation-based recovery support groups for people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse using data from A.A. as a proxy. The basic building block is the number of people who have been saved from death by these groups. We know that A.A. reports 1,297,396 members in the United States (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2018, May). If we were to count each one of these members as a life saved and then apply the same VSL used by the CEA (2017) (i.e., low, \$5.4 million; middle, \$9.6 million; and high, \$13.4 million) to estimate the cost associated with overdose mortality, this would equal a low estimate of \$7.0 trillion, a middle of \$12.5 trillion, and a high of \$17.4 trillion. These figures are of course unreasonable valuations for several reasons. First, the high estimate is nearly equal to the entire U.S. economy. Second, not all of these people would have died due to substance abuse. Finally, they do not represent the actual number of people in congregational programs, which likely equals or exceeds the A.A. membership figure.

We now offer a more reasonable way of estimating the lives saved and the statistical value of those lives through a series of steps using the data summarized in Table 3 (see Appendix for calculations). First, we begin by breaking down the A.A. *total membership* by *age structure*, knowing that people die at different rates according to age. We also know that people addicted to alcohol are much more likely to die than those who are not. We then apply the *relative mortality rate* to people with alcohol use disorder, which is estimated to be 3.45 higher than that of sober people (Laramée et al., 2015), and arrive at the excess deaths for each age group, which would have occurred had it not been for A.A. However, to assume that all people in A.A. will stay sober and reduce their risk of death is unreasonable, given that some A.A. members relapse and thus put themselves at a higher risk. Adopting a conservative approach, we take into our calculation only A.A. members who have been sober for five years or more and are likely to stay sober. According to Dennis, Foss, and Scott (2007), 86% of people reaching this threshold tend to remain sober.

To explain our calculations, we will first discuss the process without taking age differences into account. In the overall U.S. population, 849.3 people per 100,000 die yearly according to the latest mortality data (Xu et al., 2018). This means that out of the total A.A. membership of 1,297,396 people (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2018, May), 11,019 can be expected to die due to all causes (e.g., age, accident, disease, etc.). However, if all these A.A. members were still addicted to alcohol (i.e., had alcohol use disorder), the mortality rate would be three to four times higher or, as estimated by Laramée et al. (2015), 3.45 times higher, which would be 38,015 people. This is 26,996 more deaths than would be generally expected; in other words, these are 26,996 people who would have possibly died but did not because they were the sober members of A.A. We could stop here; however, to be more conservative in our estimate, realizing that there are high rates of relapse in the first years of sobriety, we will focus on counting as successful only 49% of that total (13,228), which is the share of A.A. members who have achieved five or more years of sobriety. Moreover, even among those achieving five years or more of sobriety, 86% are likely to relapse



(Dennis, Foss, & Scott, 2007). Applying this additional condition means that 11,376 people are alive this year who otherwise would not have been without achieving sobriety.

Using a similar process, we now incorporate into the calculations A.A. membership age differences from the 2016 A.A. membership survey. Combining these data with age- and gender-specific mortality data (Xu et al., 2018) will yield an age-adjusted total estimate of 9,878 people alive this year who otherwise would not have been without achieving sobriety through A.A. (see [Grim and Grim 2019](#), Appendix, Table B, for calculations). This estimation may seem by some as overly conservative, especially because a common story of A.A. members is that were it not for A.A., they would be in jail, institutionalized, or dead. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to incorporate into our estimates these theoretically and empirically relevant factors.

The age-adjusted estimate of 9,878 lives saved through A.A. annually provides a proxy that can be used to estimate the economic impact of congregation-based recovery groups. Dividing this number by the 61,904 A.A. groups in the United States (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2018, May) indicates that 0.16 lives are saved per group each year. Multiplying this figure of 0.16 lives per group by the 129,680 faith congregations with recovery groups provides an estimate of 20,693 lives saved each year. Taking this figure and applying the VSL from the CEA provide three age-adjusted estimates of the value of these congregational efforts: low, \$111.7 billion; middle, \$198.6 billion; and high, \$277.3 billion (see Table 3).

Further, following the CEA’s estimate of non-fatality costs, we can also consider the shorter term fatality prevention benefit of those who have been sober. Dennis, Foss, and Scott (2007) found that 66% of the alcoholics who remain sober for one year or more did not relapse. We can use this as a reasonable estimate of the number of people who remain sober in any given year. The 2016 A.A. survey reports that 73% of A.A. members are sober for one year or more, which equals 947,099 people. If 66% of these do not relapse during the year, we can estimate that 625,085 people are kept from entering the rehab or criminal justice systems. Turning that into a per-group number would be 10.1 persons per group; across the 129,680 congregational support groups, that would be 1,309,463 people. Using the CEA’s estimate for *non-fatality costs of addiction* (\$30,000 each), this would be \$39.3 billion worth of value (see Table 4). Adding this to the VSL estimates yields the total annual valuations of congregational recovery support groups at a low \$151.0 billion, a middle \$237.9 billion, and a high \$316.6 billion.

Table 4. Estimated Annual Valuation of Congregational Substance Abuse Recovery Programs

VSL Assumption	Fatalities Prevented (\$ in billion)	Non-fatality Value (\$ in billion)	Total Value (\$ in billion)
Low	111.7	39.3	151.0
Middle	198.6	39.3	237.9
High	277.3	39.3	316.6



Note: Assumes 20,693 lives saved annually (0.16 lives per group in 129,680 faith congregations). This is then multiplied by the VSL used by the CEA (2017) (i.e., low, \$5.4 million; middle, \$9.6 million; and high, \$13.4 million). Non-fatality value assumes 10.1 persons per group stay sober in a given year across the 129,680 congregational support groups, equaling 1,309,463 people. Using the CEA's estimate for non-fatality costs (\$30,000 each), this equals \$39.3 billion.

Sources: A.A. (2014, 2018, May); CEA (2017); Dennis, Foss, and Scott (2007); Grim and Grim (2016); Laramée et al. (2015); National Vital Statistics Reports (Xu et al., 2018). CEA Sources: Aldy & Viscusi (2008); U.S. DOT (2016); CDC WONDER database, multiple cause of death files; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016); Ruhm (2017)

Volunteer addiction recovery support groups meeting in congregations around the United States contribute up to \$316.6 billion in benefit to the U.S. economy every year *at no cost to tax payers*. And this represents only a portion of the faith-based work addressing the addiction crisis.

ESTIMATE 2: THE REVENUES OF RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED AMERICANS

The second estimate of this study recognizes that many, if not most, people of faith aim to conduct their affairs (to some extent, however imperfectly) guided by and inspired by their religious ideals. In a recent Atlantic article by Jared Keller⁵² and an earlier Harvard Business Review article by Charles Handy,⁵³ there is a keen sense that the tie between religion and the American spirit put forth in the 19th century by Alexis de Tocqueville,⁵⁴ a French observer of American life, is still alive and well. Referencing Australian author Robert Hughes, Handy notes:

The Puritans saw themselves as successors to Moses, leading their people to a promised land and starting a new phase of history. That vision still holds today. On the back of every one-dollar bill are the words *novus ordo seclorum* – “a new order of the ages.” John Winthrop, their leader, famously preached a sermon in mid-Atlantic in which he spoke of creating a “city upon a hill” where “the eyes of all people are upon us.” Hughes argues that the Puritans’ values infect the great bulk of Americans to this day. They implanted the American work ethic, as well as the tenacious primacy of religion in American life, equaled only by the Muslim world. In no other country would presidential candidates feel it electorally desirable to proclaim their religious beliefs.⁵⁵

⁵² Keller, Jared. 2015. “What Makes Americans So Optimistic? Why the U.S. tends to look on the bright side.” *The Atlantic*, March 25, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/03/the-american-ethic-and-the-spirit-of-optimism/388538/>.

⁵³ Handy, Charles. 2001. “Tocqueville Revisited: The Meaning of American Prosperity.” Harvard Business Review, January issue, <https://hbr.org/2001/01/tocqueville-revisited-the-meaning-of-american-prosperity>.

⁵⁴ Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1945 [1835]. *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1. New York: Vintage.

⁵⁵ Handy, Charles. 2001. “Tocqueville Revisited: The Meaning of American Prosperity.” Harvard Business Review, January issue,



To the extent that religious ethics and ethos pervade how Americans approach work and life, it could be argued that religion’s socioeconomic contribution to American society is incalculably large. Perhaps one way to count its value is to take into account the incomes of religiously affiliated people. This is not so different than a similar methodology used in a recent study conducted for the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith.⁵⁶ That study connected self-identified religious affiliation with economic environments around the world, seeking to examine how different religious groups will grow both in population and economic power in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) under their control.⁵⁷

Similar to the methodology used in that study, our upper-end estimate of the contribution of religion to American society is based on the estimated annual income of people of faith. For a ballpark estimate, we simply take the share of the adult US population that is religiously affiliated (77.2 percent, according to Pew Research) and multiply that by the median household income, as shown in Table 5. Given that Pew Research indicates that a higher share of religiously unaffiliated people is in the highest income categories,⁵⁸ the \$4.8 trillion estimate, or the equivalent of nearly a third of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), is most likely an upper-end estimate. Our intent in providing this estimate, however, is not to achieve exact precision, but to offer another plausible way to take into account the contribution of religion to the American economy.

Table 5. Income of Religiously Affiliated (77.2% of population)		
	Household Income	Annual Revenue
Households in US (116,211,092)	\$53,482	\$6,215,736,442,344
Affiliated Households (89,714,963)	\$53,482	\$4,798,135,652,450
Unaffiliated Households (26,498,129)	\$53,482	\$1,417,187,908,854
Sources: Pew Research http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/ and US Census Bureau for Number & median income of households: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/HSD410214/00 (Figures may not total due to rounding of decimals.)		

<https://hbr.org/2001/01/tocqueville-revisited-the-meaning-of-american-prosperity>.

⁵⁶ Grim, Brian J., and Phillip Connor. 2015. “Changing religion, changing economies: Future global religious and economic growth,” Research prepared for the Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith. Internet: <http://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Changing-religion-Changing-economies-Religious-Freedom-Business-Foundation-October-21-2015.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Grim, Brian J., and Phillip Connor. 2015. “Changing religion, changing economies: Future global religious and economic growth,” Research prepared for the Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith. Internet: <http://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Changing-religion-Changing-economies-Religious-Freedom-Business-Foundation-October-21-2015.pdf>.

⁵⁸ See: http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/pr_15-05-12_rls_chapter3-04/.



Adjustments for Estimates of US States (North Carolina as an Example)

Applying these national-level calculations to individual states requires taking into account differences between the aggregate national and individual state congregational and demographic characteristics.

First, we adjust the congregational direct spending based upon the average size of the congregations in the state versus the average size nationally. For example, the average size of a congregation in North Carolina is 288 members compared with 437 nationally (see Table 6).

Table 6. Adjustment for Congregation Size* in Financial Calculations			
	North Carolina	Nationally	Adjustment:
Congregations (#):	15,737	344,894	
Members (#):	4,530,365	150,596,792	
Members per Congregation:	288	437	65.9%

* Congregational adherents include all full members, their children, and others who regularly attend services.

Source: 2010 data were collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and include statistics for 236 religious groups, providing information on the number of their congregations and adherents within each state and county in the United States. Clifford Grammich, Kirk Hadaway, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley and Richard H. Taylor supervised the collection. These data originally appeared in 2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study, published by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB).

This means that the average congregation in North Carolina is 65.9% the size of the national average. So, taking this as an indication of the giving potential of a congregation (which is a proxy for the congregation’s level of direct spending), we estimate that an average North Carolina congregation’s direct spending is \$160,150, as shown in Table 7. This is 65.9% of the national average of \$242,910.⁵⁹

Then, as with the national calculations, we applied this congregational direct spending figure (representing 20% of a congregation’s overall valuation) to calculate the following: Individual Impact (37.9 percent); Education (21.8 percent); Magnet Effect (16.7 percent); Invisible Safety Net (3.5 percent); and Open Space (0.1 percent), as described above (pp. 12-13).

Table 7. Valuation of Congregations' Socio-Economic Contribution Annually to North Carolina (Multiple Faiths), 2019 est.		
Description	Average per congregation***	Total amount across 15,737 congregations

⁵⁹ Table 2, data point 1



Congregation's Direct Spending*	\$160,150	\$2,520,278,334
Individual Impact*	\$303,484	\$4,775,927,443
Education*	\$174,563	\$2,747,103,384
Magnet Effect*	\$133,725	\$2,104,432,409
Invisible Safety Net*	\$28,026	\$441,048,708
Open Space*	\$801	\$12,601,392
Addiction Recovery Support**	\$93,634	\$1,473,513,268
Total	\$894,383	\$14,074,904,937

Sources: Studies by Brian J. Grim and Melissa E. Grim published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Religion and Health* and the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*: *Grim, B.J. & Grim, M.E. *IJRR* (2016) Volume 12, Article 3, <http://www.religjournal.com/pdf/ijrr12003.pdf>; and **Grim, B.J. & Grim, M.E. *J Relig Health* (2019) 58: 1713-1750. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w>.

***Dollar figures and total numbers are reported in detail based on calculations from the datasets used by Grim & Grim, also weighted by average congregational membership size within North Carolina of 288 members per congregation and 31.9% of congregations in US southeast having addiction recovery programs; the actual precision is less, but is 95% likely to be within the survey's margin of error of +/-3%. Figures may not total due to rounding of decimals.

To calculate the value of the addiction recovery programs provided by congregations in North Carolina, we draw on the original data from the National Congregations Study to determine the percentage of congregations in the US south that provide such programs. As shown below in Table 8, 31.9% of congregations in US south having addiction recovery programs, so we apply this to calculate the addiction recovery support figure, which equals \$93,634 per congregation, as shown above in Table 7.⁶⁰

Table 8: Congregation-based Substance Abuse Programs					
	Region of U.S.				National
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	
Have Programs	30.4%	40.1%	31.9%	59.8%	37.6%
No programs	69.6%	59.9%	68.1%	40.2%	62.4%
Sample size	161	304	677	189	1331

Source: National Congregations Study, Cumulative Dataset, 2012
SUBABUSE (Weighted by WTA3CNGD) Within the past 12 months, have there been any groups or meetings or classes or events specifically focused on the following purposes or activities? Support for people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse?
http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Analysis/NCSIIIED/NCSIIIED_Var469_1.asp

With the changing religious landscape, we looked at the most recent available measures of religious affiliation for each state. In the case of North Carolina, we considered both the Pew

⁶⁰ See pp. 14-19 for calculations of the value of congregational addiction recovery programs.



Religious Landscape study and the Elon University Poll, which conducts regular surveys of North Carolina. The most recent Elon Poll found that 85.4% of all residents surveyed were religiously affiliated, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Religious Affiliation in North Carolina, Elon Poll 2015				
	<u>Registered Voters</u>		<u>All Residents</u>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Born-Again Protestant	17.0%	115	16.1%	122
Other Non-Catholic Christian	54.5%	369	52.6%	398
Catholic	8.0%	54	8.2%	62
Other	7.2%	49	8.5%	64
SUBTOTAL RELIGIOUS	86.7%		85.4%	
Not Religious	10.8%	73	11.6%	87
Don't Know	2.0%	14	2.2%	16
Refused	0.5%	3	0.8%	6
TOTAL	100.0%	677	100.0%	756
<p>Source: Elon Poll: April 20-24, 2015. https://www.elon.edu/u/elon-poll/wp-content/uploads/sites/819/2019/02/042815_ElonPollSummary.pdf. Question: Do you consider yourself Christian, Jewish, Muslim, something else, or not religious? Do you consider yourself Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, or something else? [if Christian] Some people think of themselves as evangelical or born again Christians. Do you ever consider yourself in either of these ways? [If Protestant]</p>				

The 2014 Pew Research Center had a larger sample size of 1,022. The Pew poll found that 80% of adults in North Carolina were religiously affiliated, as shown in Table 10 on the next page.



Table 10: Religious Affiliation in North Carolina, Pew Survey 2014

Christian	77%	Non-Christian Faiths	3%
▶ Evangelical Protestant	35%	Jewish	1%
▶ Mainline Protestant	49%	Muslim	< 1%
▶ Historically Black Protestant	12%	Buddhist	< 1%
Catholic	9%	Hindu	< 1%
▶ Mormon	1%	Other World Religions	< 1%
▶ Orthodox Christian	1%	▶ Other Faiths	1%
Jehovah's Witness	1%	Unaffiliated (religious "nones")	20%
▶ Other Christian	< 1%	Atheist	2%
		Agnostic	3%
		▶ Nothing in particular	15%
		Don't know	< 1%

Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study, 2014. N=1022, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/north-carolina/>.

Due to larger sample size of the Pew poll and – cognizant of the national trends toward lower religious affiliation since both polls were taken – we chose to use the Pew figure for the share of people in North Carolina who are religiously affiliated. (As newer polls become available, this figure may be adjusted further.) There are approximately 3.9 million households in North Carolina with a median household income of about \$50,320. Using the Pew estimate that 80% of adults in North Carolina are religiously affiliated, their households account for about \$156 billion (80%) of the total household income in the state, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Household Incomes in North Carolina, 2018 est.

Households	Median Household Income	Household income of Religiously Affiliated
All Households	\$50,320	\$194,957,090,720
Income of Religiously Affiliated Households	\$50,320	\$155,965,672,576
Income of Religiously Un-affiliated Households	\$50,320	\$38,991,418,144

Sources: Study by Brian J. Grim and Melissa E. Grim published in the peer-reviewed *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*: Grim, B.J. & Grim, M.E. IJRR (2016) Volume 12, Article 3, <http://www.relighjournal.com/pdf/ijrr12003.pdf>. Household data: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NC> and religious affiliation: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/north-carolina>.

Our intent in providing this estimate is not to achieve exact precision, but to offer another plausible way to take into account the contribution of religion to the American economy.



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