



# Data-driven Practices to Cultivate Generosity within Your Congregation

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# Data-driven Practices to Cultivate Generosity within Your Congregation

# What is Generosity?

“Generosity is the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly. It is a learned character trait that involves attitude and action entailing both the inclination and actual practice of giving liberally. It is not a haphazard behavior but a basic orientation to life. What generosity gives can vary: money, possessions, time, attention, aid, encouragement, and more but it always intends to enhance the true wellbeing of the receiver. Like all virtues, generosity is in people’s genuine enlightened self-interest to learn and practice.”

Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Generosity Project*, Notre Dame





# Data-driven Practices to Cultivate Generosity within Your Congregation

Navigating the Landscape  
of Religious Fundraising

# Religious Giving

Source: Giving  
USA  
Foundation™  
Giving USA 2024



## **Giving up by 1.9%**

*-2.1% adjusted for inflation*

Total estimated charitable giving in the United States reached \$557.16 billion. Total giving grew by 1.9 percent between 2022 and 2023 in current dollars, and declined 2.1 percent when adjusted for inflation.



## **Individual giving up by 1.6%**

*-2.4% adjusted for inflation*

Giving by individuals totaled an estimated \$374.40 billion, growing by 1.6 percent in 2023 (a decline of 2.4 percent, when adjusted for inflation).



## **Religious giving up 2.1%**

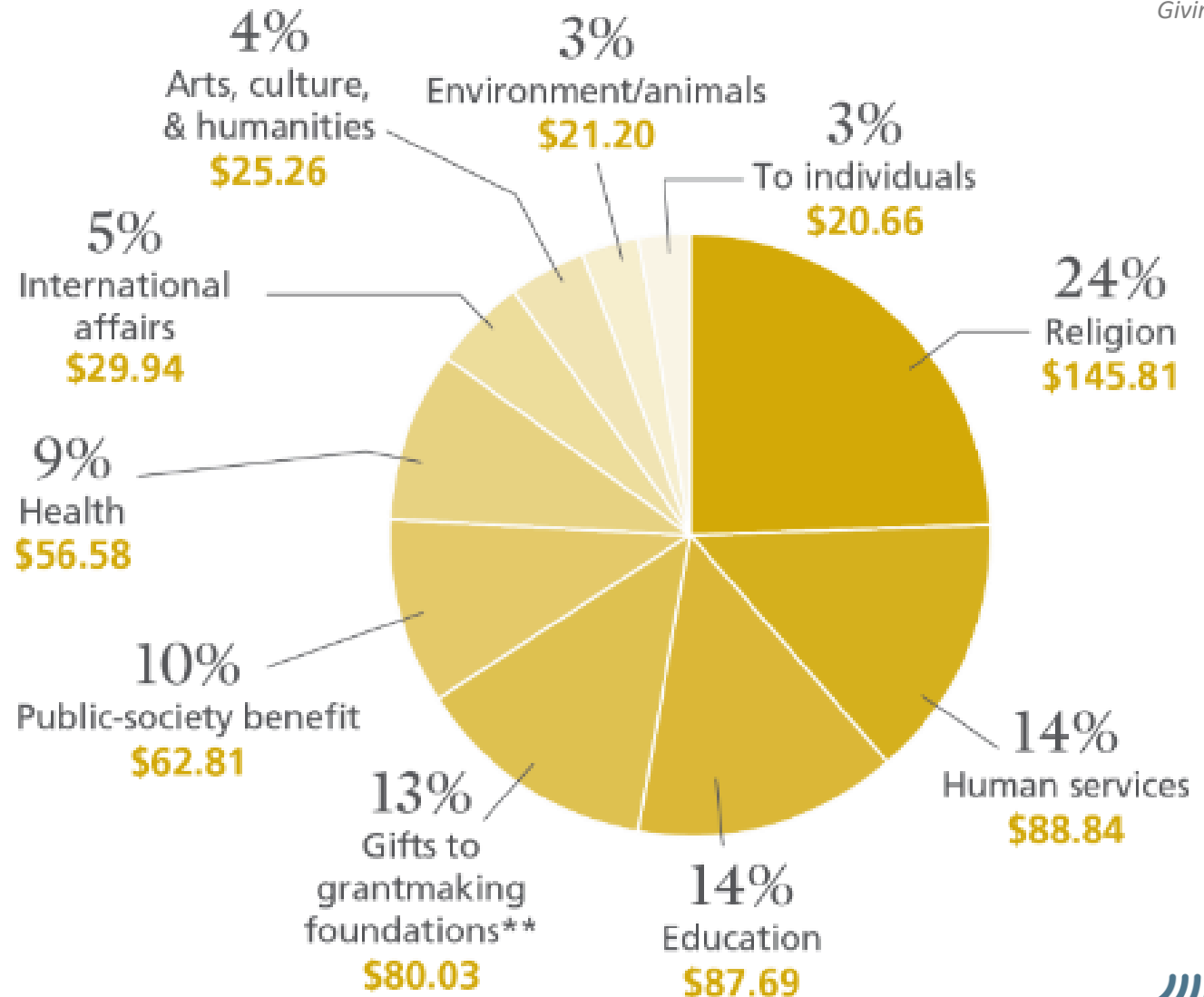
*-1.0% adjusted for inflation*

Giving to religion grew by 2.1 percent between 2022 and 2023, with an estimated \$145.81 billion in contributions. Inflation-adjusted giving to the religion subsector declined by 1.0 percent.

# Religion is the Beneficiary of Donor Generosity

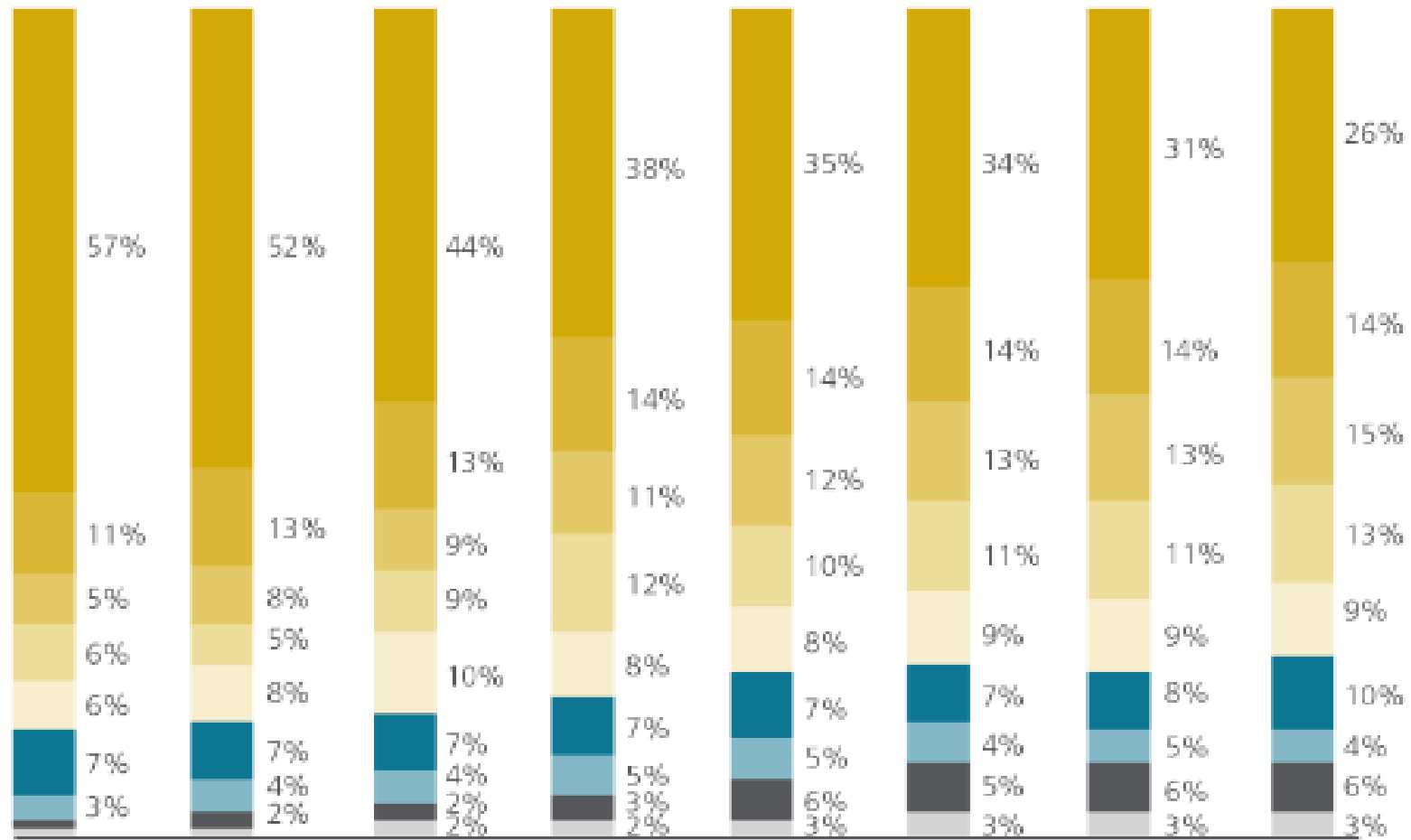
Source: Giving USA Foundation™  
Giving USA 2024

**2023 Contributions:**  
\$557.16 billion by  
type of recipient  
organization  
(in billions of dollars – all  
figures are rounded)





# Giving to Religion: Declining as a Share of Total Giving



Giving by type of recipient as a percentage of the total in five-year spans, 1984-2023\* (adjusts for inflation, 2023 = \$100, does not include "unallocated" or "giving to individuals")

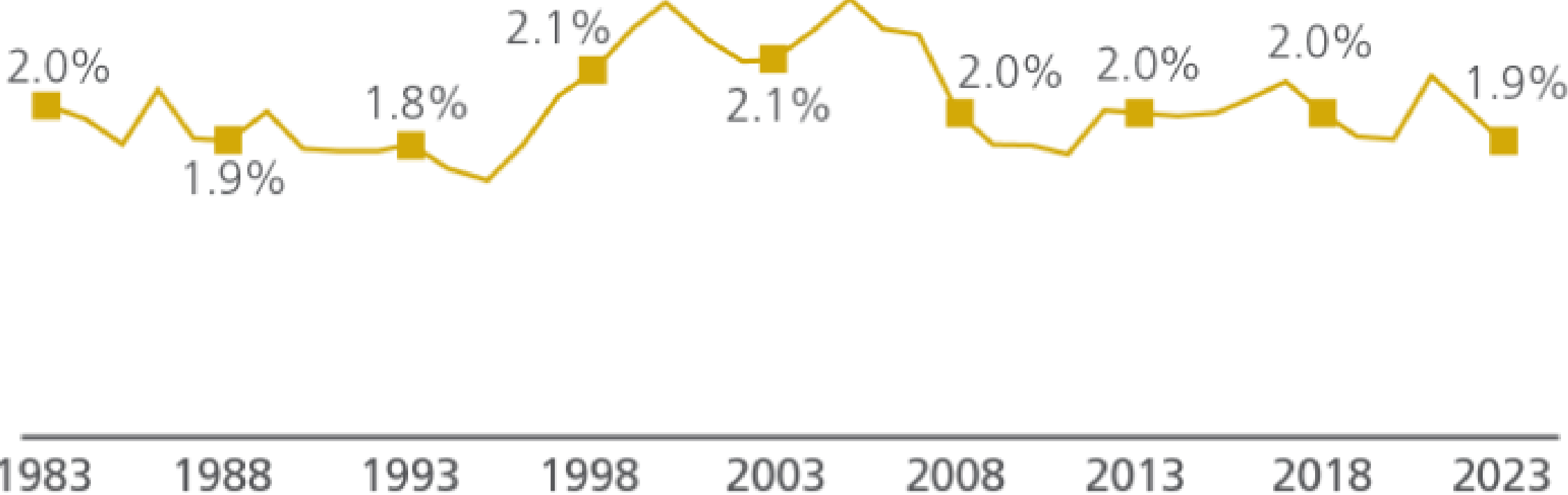
Environment & animals
  International affairs
  Arts, culture, & humanities
  Public-society benefit
  Health
  Foundations
  Human services
  Education
  Religion

Source: Giving USA Foundation™  
Giving USA 2024



# Individual giving as a percentage of disposable personal income, 1983-2023

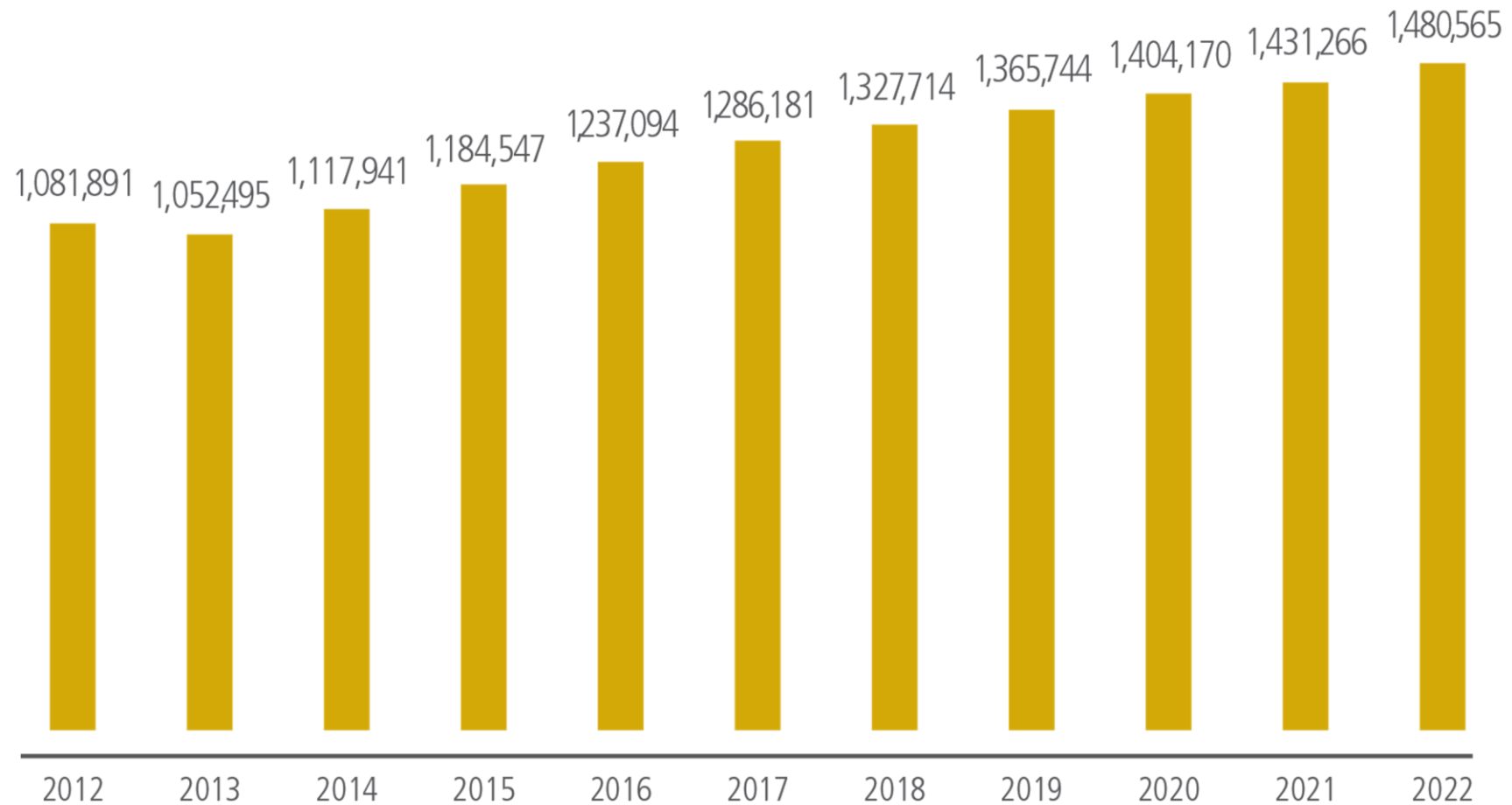
(in current dollars)



Source: Giving USA  
Foundation™  
Giving USA 2024



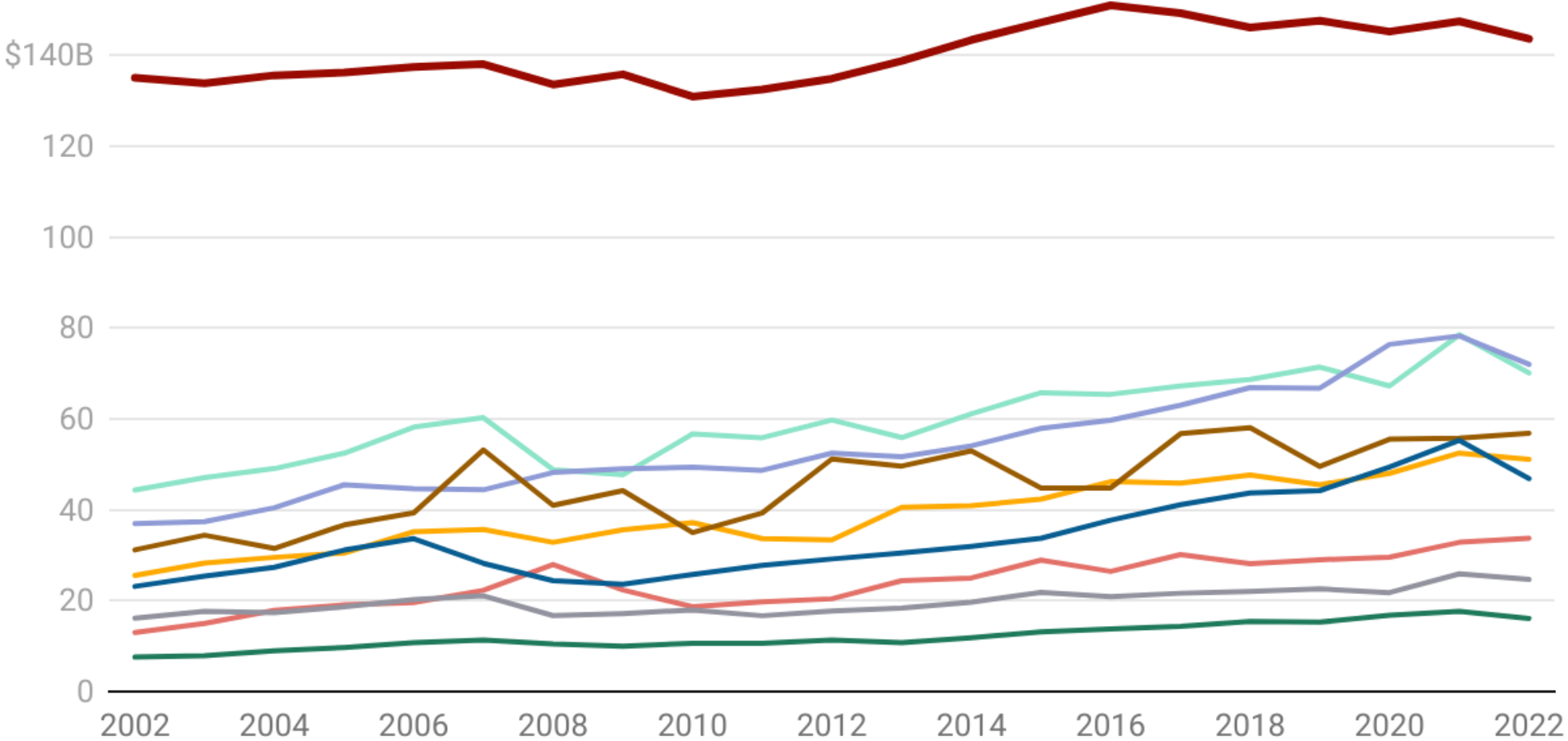
# The number of 501(c)(3) organizations, 2012-2022



Source: Giving USA Foundation™  
Giving USA 2024

# Giving to Religion

— Religion  
 — Education  
 — Human services  
 — Health  
 — Public-society benefit  
— Arts, culture, humanities  
 — Int'l affairs  
 — Environment/animals  
 — Gifts to foundations

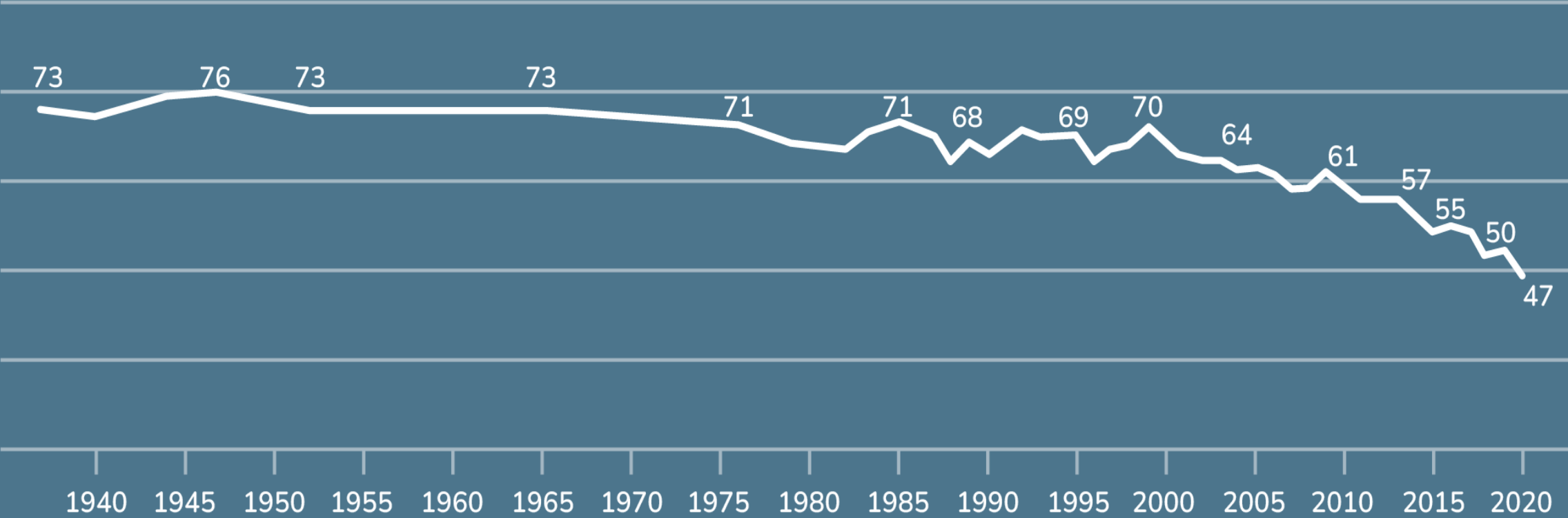


Source: Giving USA 2023

# American Religiosity: Membership in a Congregation

Do you happen to be a member of a church synagogue or mosque?

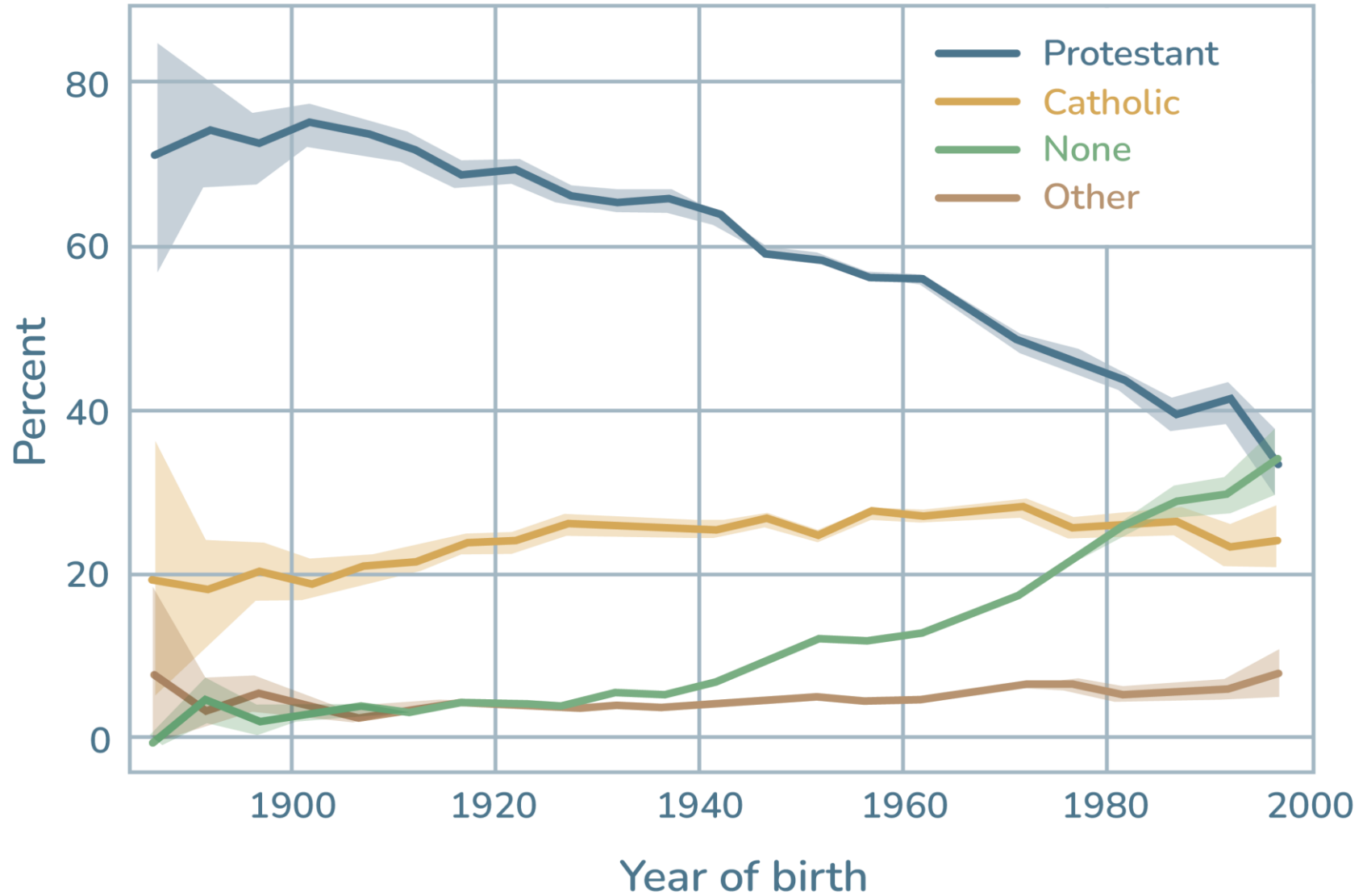
— % Yes member



Based on annual aggregated data usually based on two surveys

GALLUP

# Religious affiliation, by year of birth



Source: Scientific American 2017



# Decline in % of households giving to charity

(Share of Americans giving to charity 68% in 2002 → 55% in 2014)

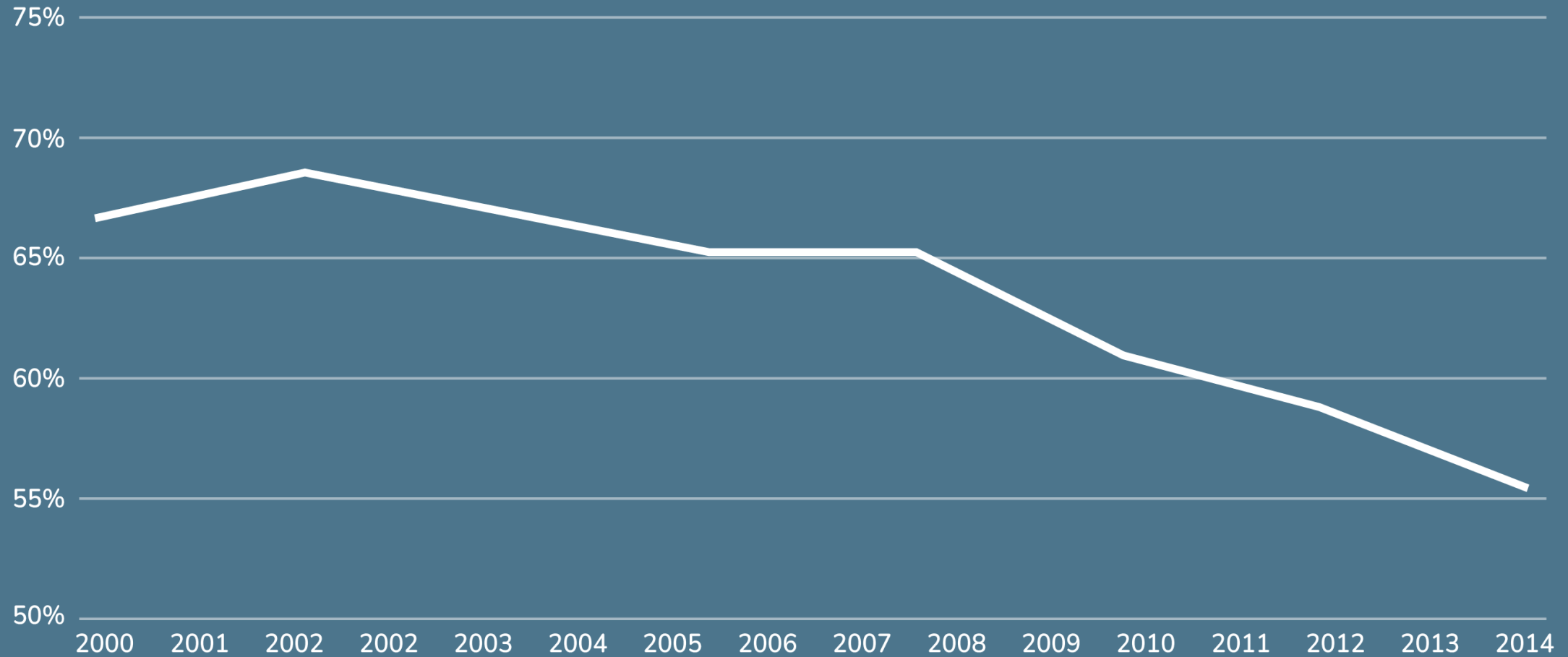
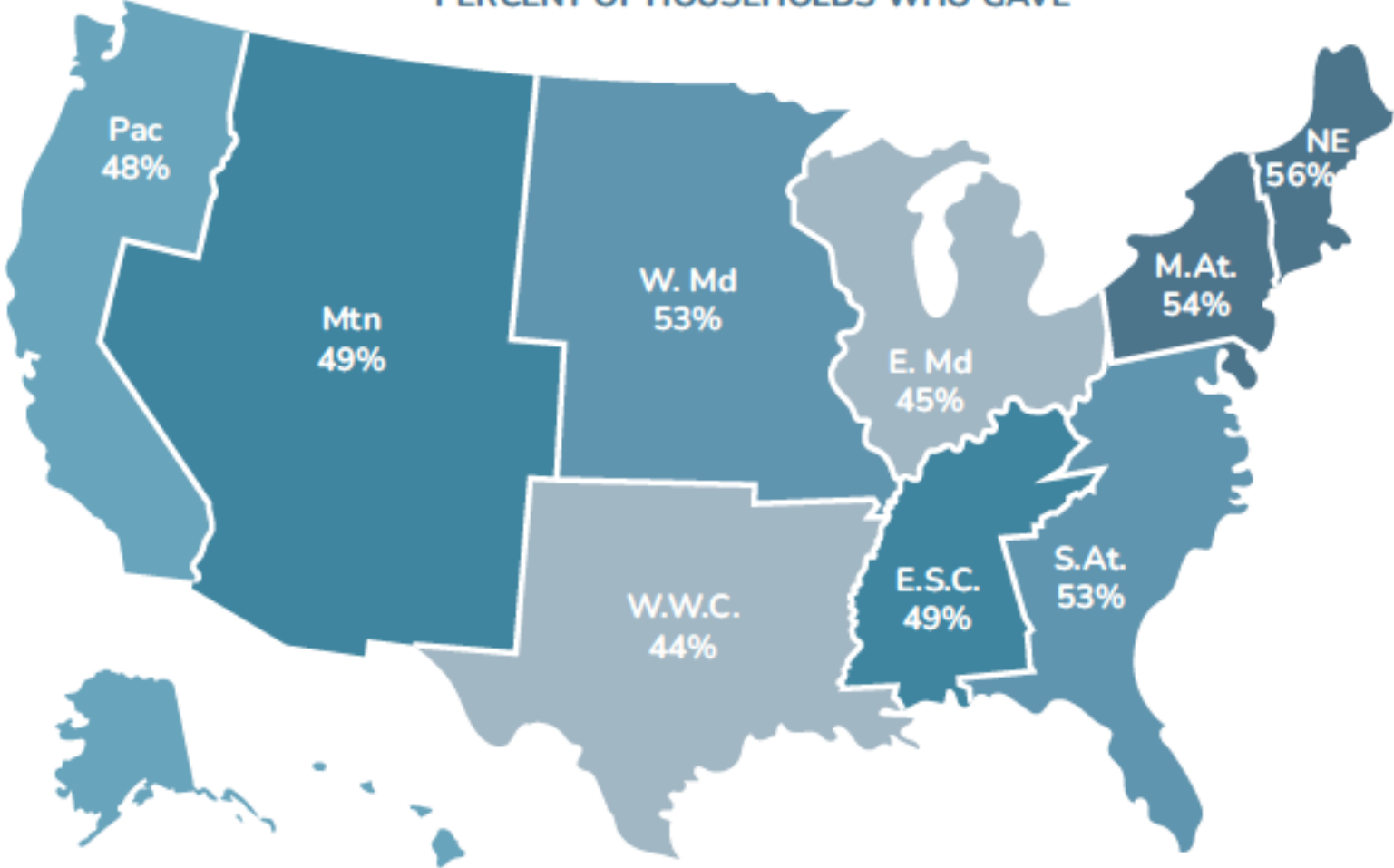


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: University of Michigan/IUPUI Lilly School of Philanthropy Panel Study • [Get the data](#)

# American Generosity

PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WHO GAVE

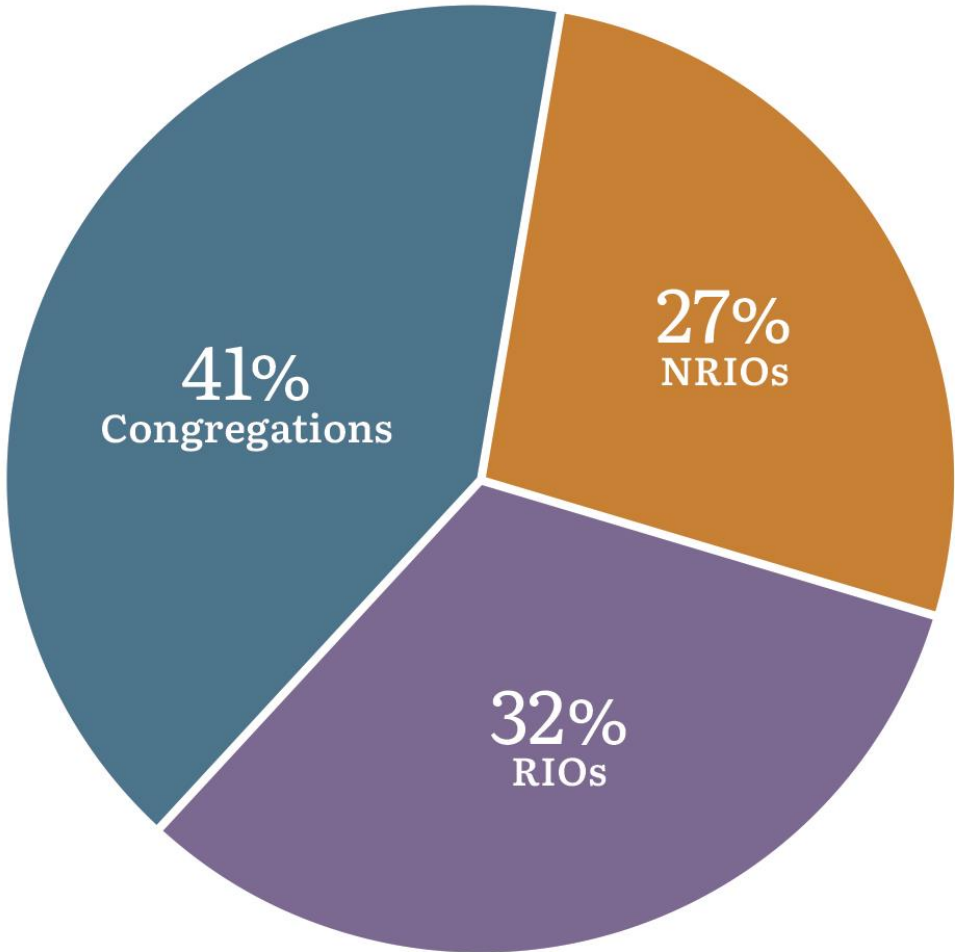
**50%** OF US HOUSEHOLDS DONATED TO CHARITY



Source: Generosity for Life, 2023

Distribution of Giving to Congregations, RIOs, and NRIOs

*The majority (73%) of Americans' charitable giving goes to organizations with religious ties: congregations as well as religiously identified organizations pursuing a variety of charitable purposes.*

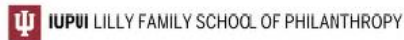


# National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices



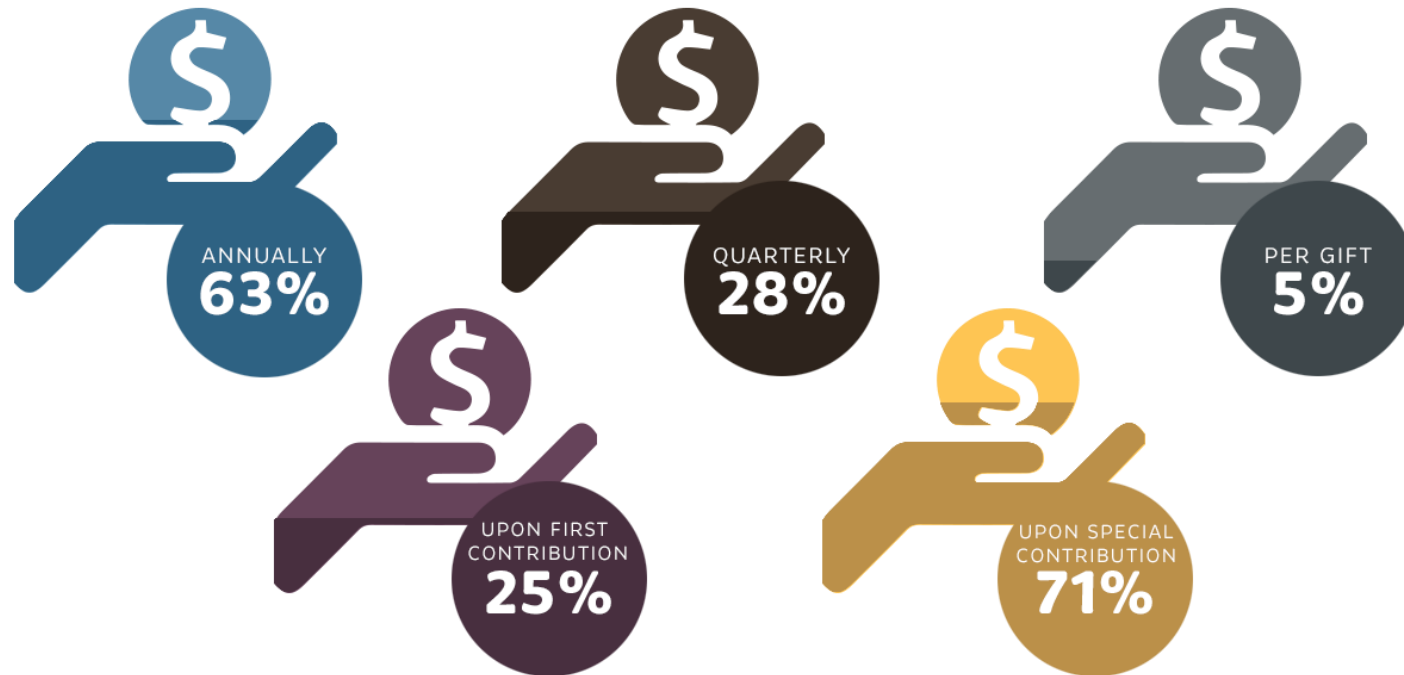
How congregations  
**receive, manage,  
spend and regard**  
their finances.

[www.nscep.org](http://www.nscep.org)

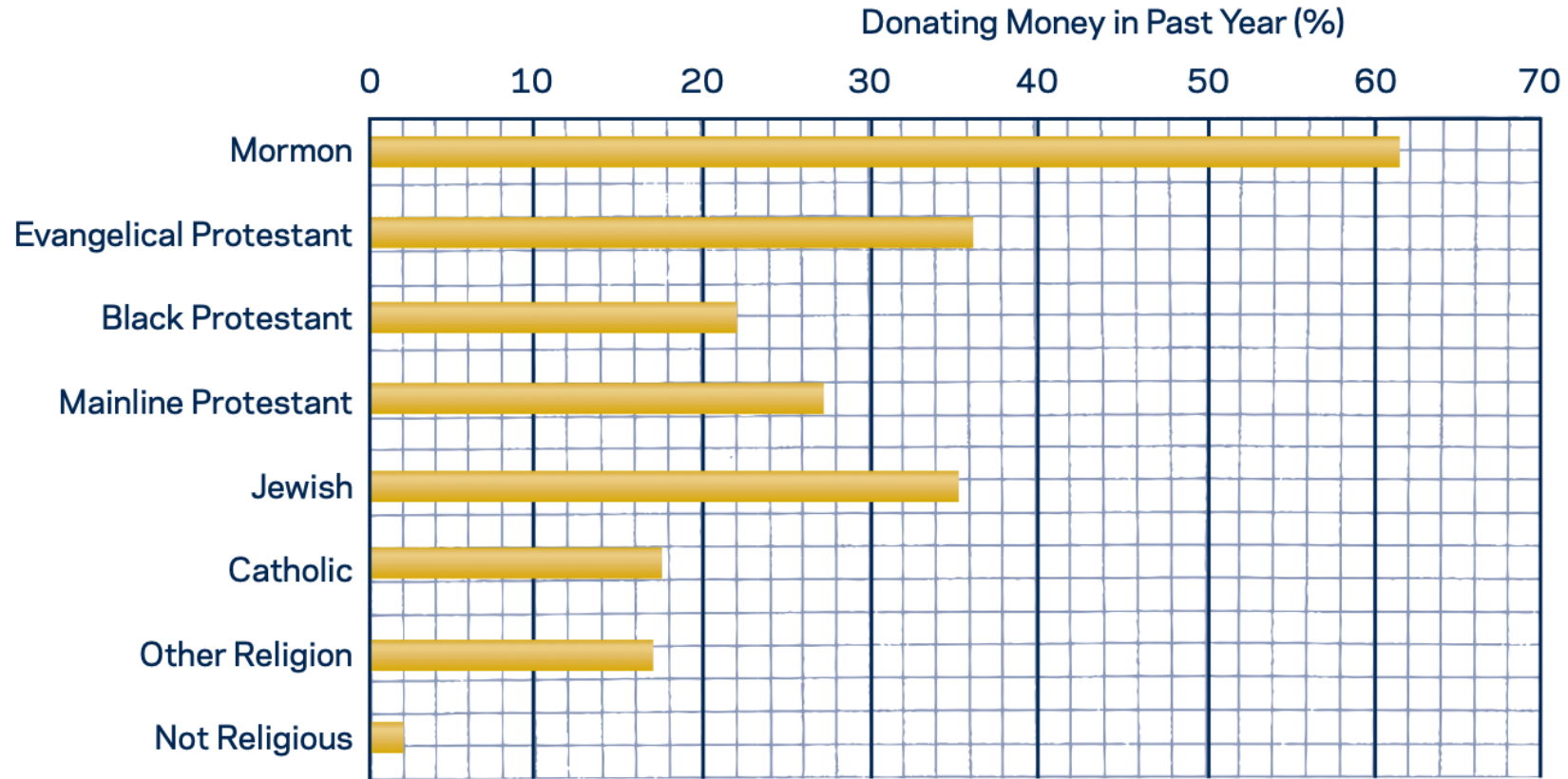


# National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices

## FREQUENCY OF ACKNOWLEDGING DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS



# Percentage Donating to Religious Organizations



Among all respondents, weighted

Source: Brian Starks and Christian Smith, Univ. of Notre Dame, Institute for Church Life



What do you see fundraising to be about? (meeting a budget, funding projects, changing the world, etc)

How do you see yourself relating to the people who give to your organization and support your mission?



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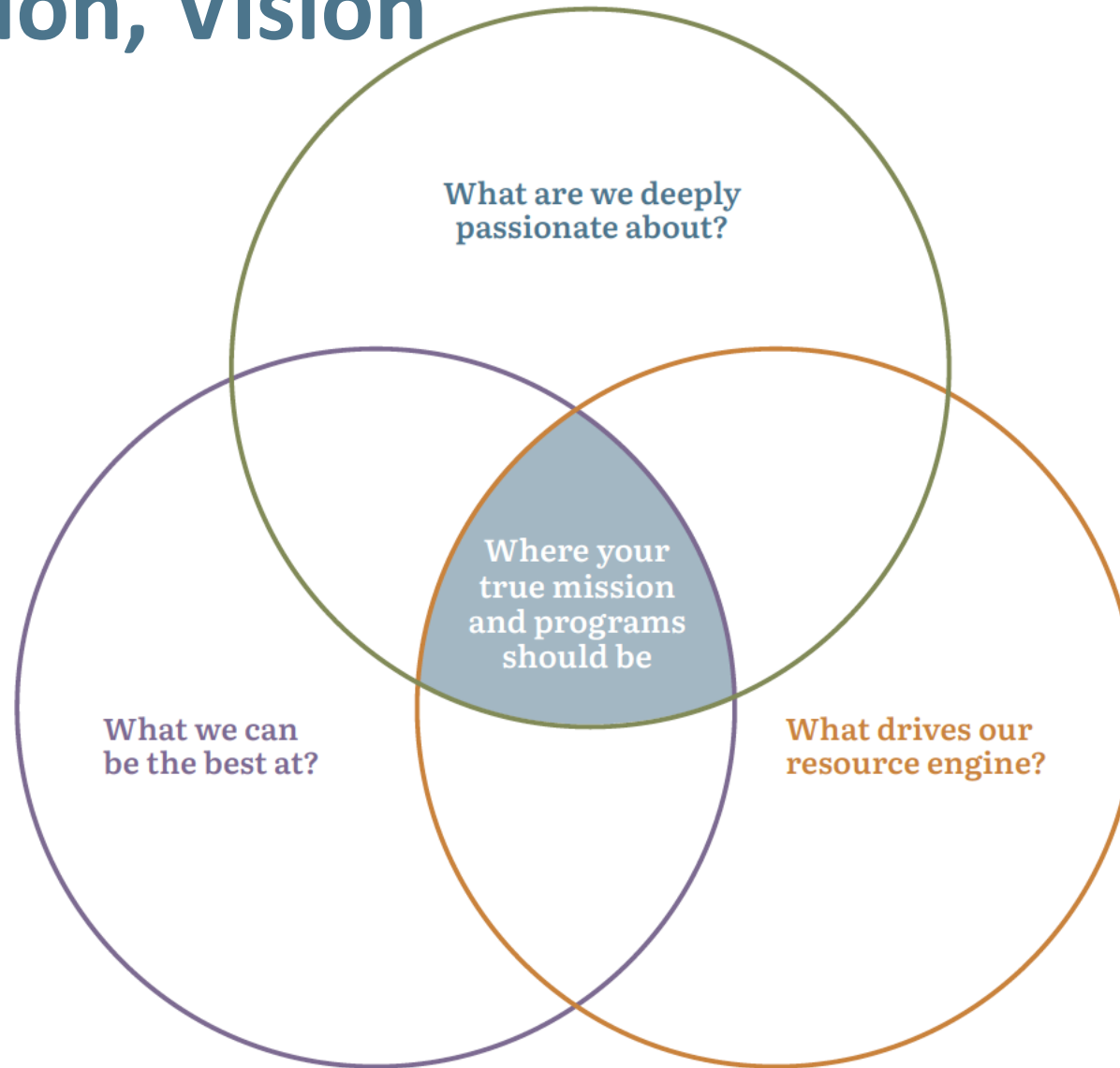
Organizational  
Foundations

# Values, Mission, Vision



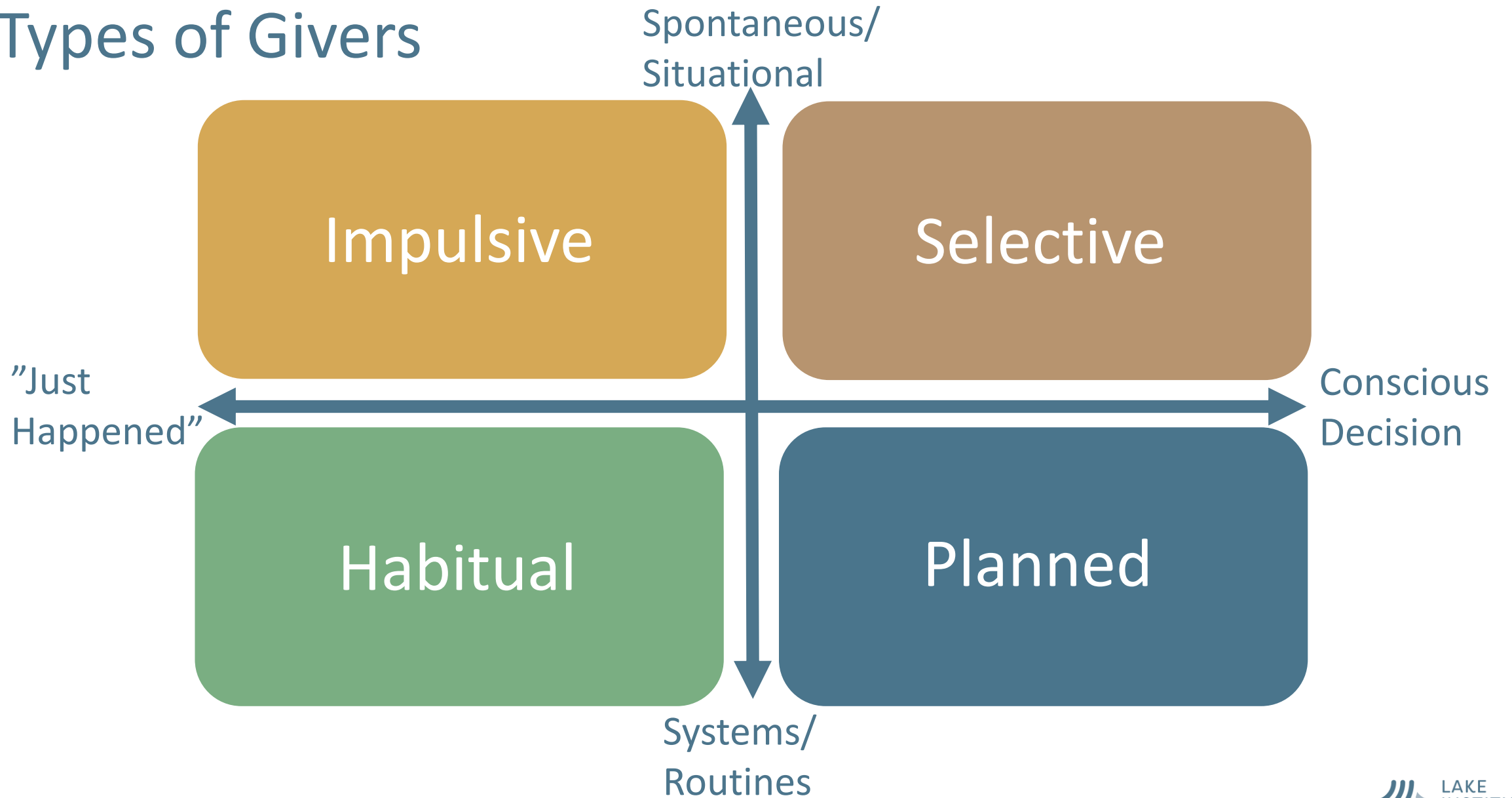
- What are our core values?
- What are our distinct challenges and opportunities?
- What are our priorities?
- What resources do we need?

# Values, Mission, Vision



1. How does your organization talk about its giving tradition or philanthropy?
2. How do your givers feel a sense of ownership for your organization?
3. How have you encouraged the giving of time, skills, ideas, networks as well as money?
4. How do you publicly celebrate your organization's giving tradition? How do you say "thank you"?
5. What are some of the institutional challenges you will need to address if your organization is to become truly generous?

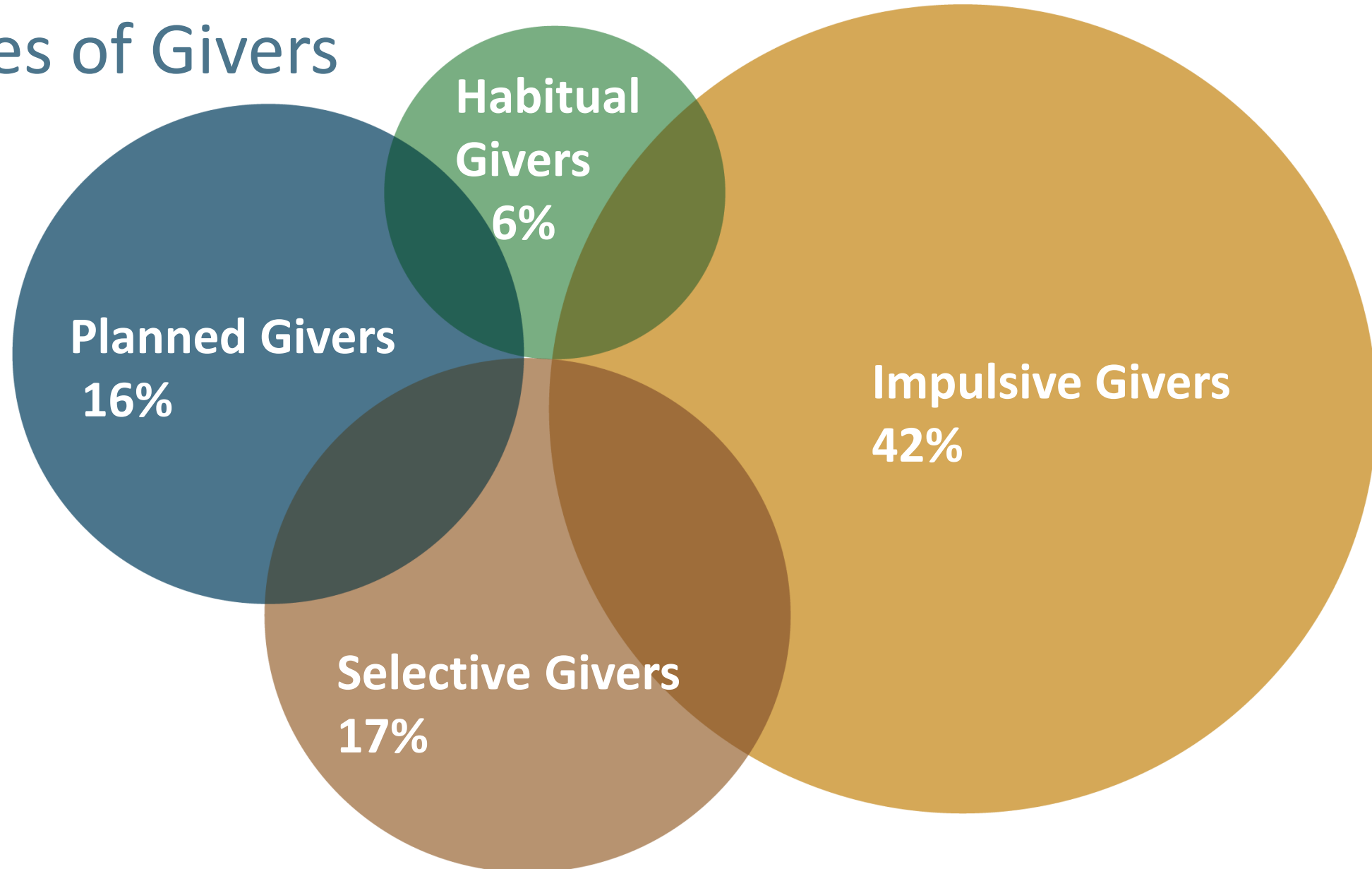
# Types of Givers



Source: Herzog and Price, American Generosity: Who Gives and Why (2016)

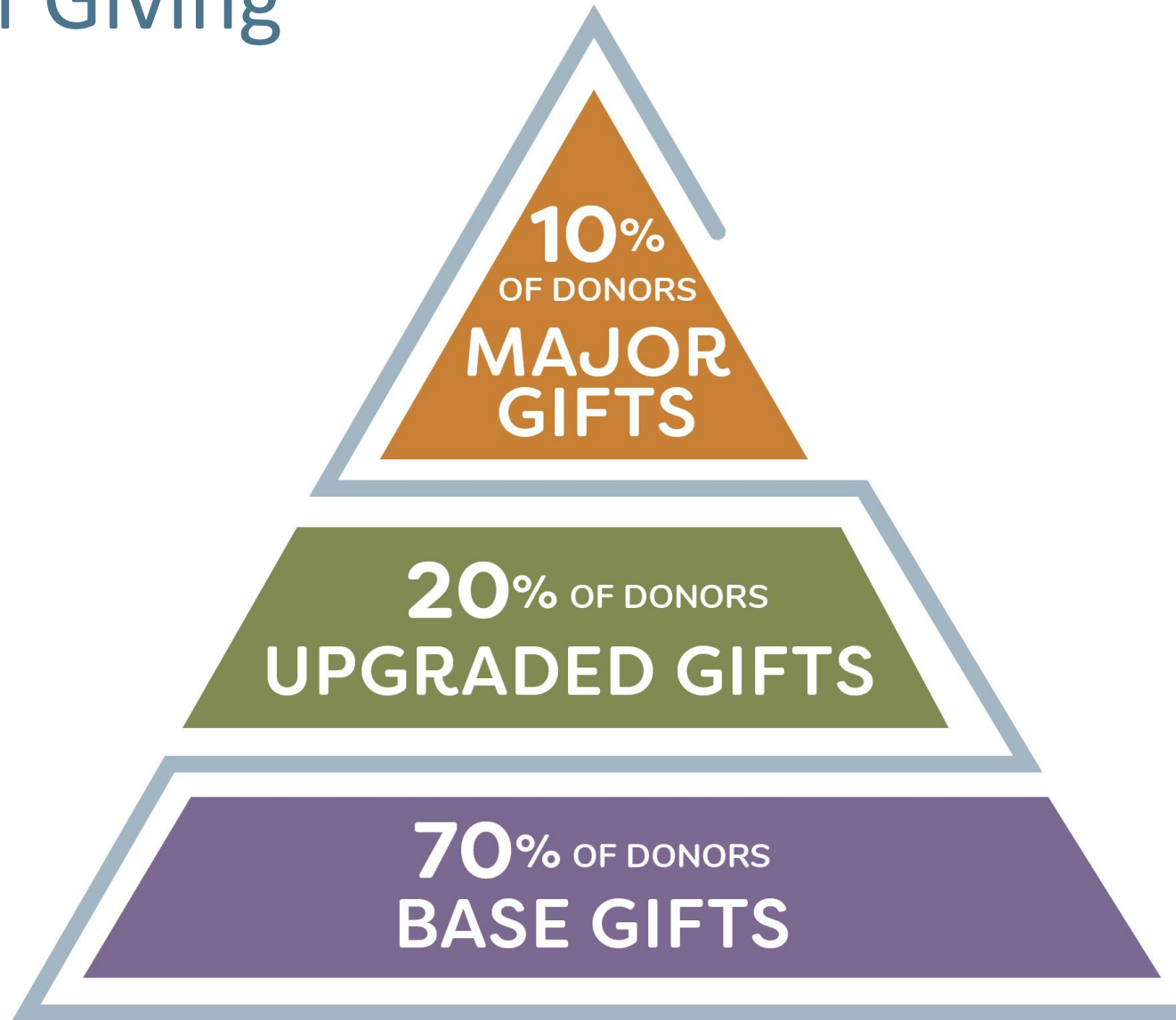


# Types of Givers



Source: Herzog and Price, American Generosity: Who Gives and Why (2016)

# Pyramid of Giving

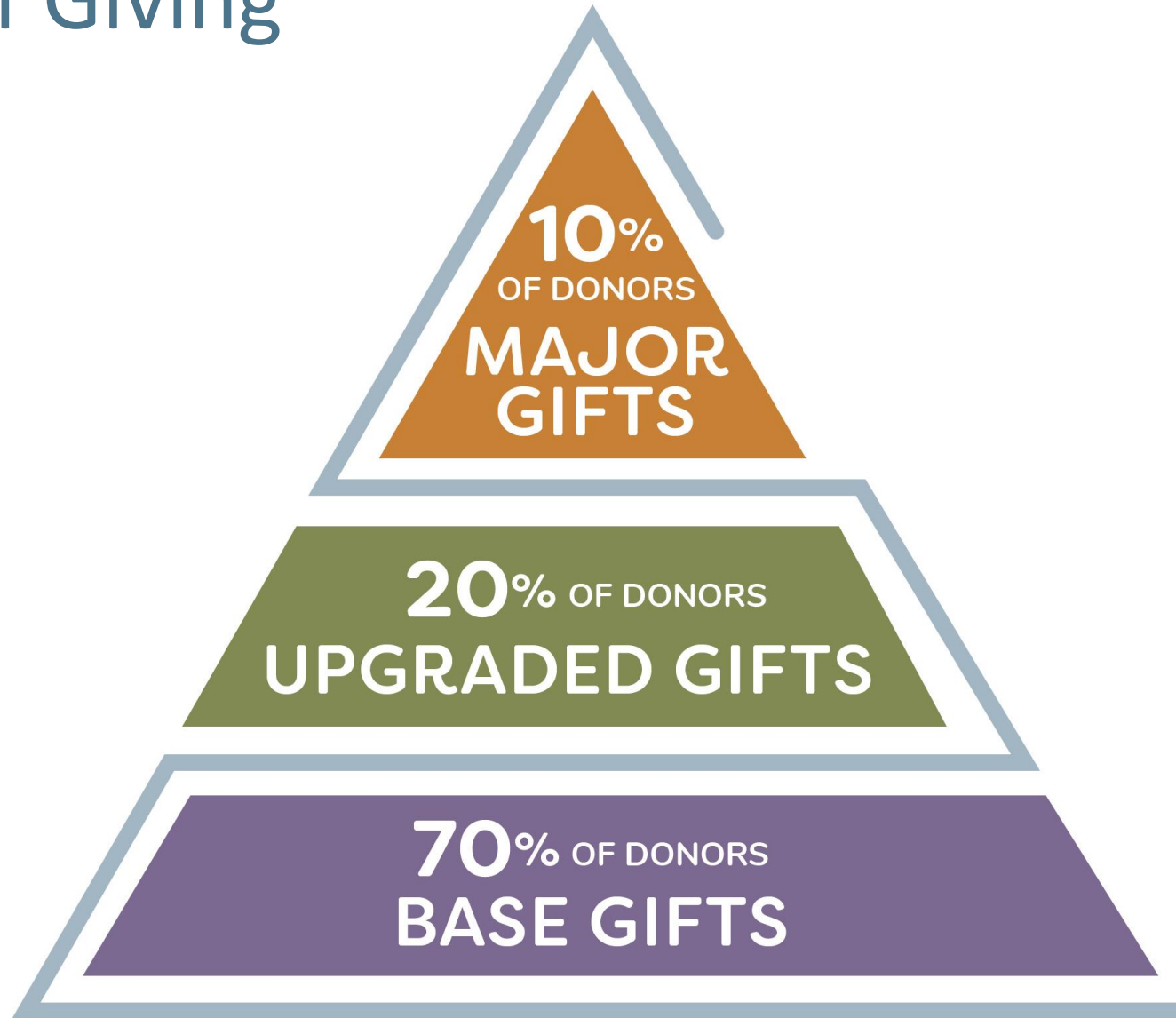


# Pyramid of Giving

Number of gift	Amount given				
1	\$20,000	21	\$1,500		
2	\$6,000	22	\$1,200	43	\$200
3	\$6,000	23	\$1,200	44	\$200
4	\$5,000	24	\$1,200	45	\$200
5	\$5,000	25	\$1,200	46	\$200
6	\$4,500	26	\$1,000	47	\$100
7	\$4,000	27	\$1,000	48	\$100
8	\$3,000	28	\$1,000	49	\$100
9	\$3,600	29	\$700	50	\$100
10	\$3,600	30	\$600	51	\$100
11	\$3,600	31	\$600	52	\$100
12	\$3,000	32	\$600	53	\$100
13	\$2,000	33	\$500	54	\$100
14	\$2,500	34	\$500	55	\$100
15	\$2,500	35	\$500	56	\$100
16	\$2,500	36	\$400	57	\$100
17	\$2,200	37	\$400	58	\$100
18	\$2,200	38	\$300	59	\$100
19	\$2,000	39	\$250	60	\$100
20	\$1,500	40	\$250		
		41	\$250		
		42	\$250		
				Total =	\$102,300
				Average =	\$1,705
				Median =	\$600

# Pyramid of Giving

Descriptive  
(Prescriptive)  
Diagnostic



# Knowledge of Individual Giving Records

- 55% of US congregations say their head clergy person has *access* to individual giving records.
- 58% of those clergy who have access report actually looking at the giving records.
- In congregations where the clergy had access and used that access, 58% had a trend of increased giving over the past three years (relative to 48% of all congregations reporting increased giving)





## The Work of an Innkeeper

The Good Samaritan, Vincent Van Gogh  
(detail) 1890



# A Spirituality of Fundraising

Henri Nouwen:

**“To raise funds is to offer people the chance to invest what they have in the work of God. Whether they have much or little is not as important as making their money available to God.”**



# Connect

Lake Institute on Faith & Giving

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