

Foreword

Robert W. Edgar, General Secretary, National Council of Churches;
Board member, INDEPENDENT SECTOR

In his 1831 reflections on democracy in America, Alexis de Tocqueville said, in effect, that America is great because she is good. If ever she ceases to be good, she will cease to be great. We can reasonably assume from the context of this quotation that Tocqueville is utilizing moral language to describe the quality of motivation and generosity he had observed in his exposure to the civic and voluntary life of early America.

This INDEPENDENT SECTOR report picks up on Tocqueville's long-neglected theme. Like Tocqueville at his best, this study holds up a mirror to the landscape of American philanthropy and reflects back to us a picture that shows a bold and

persistent link between patterns of giving to religious institutions and to the broader society.

Most pastors, priests, rabbis, imams, and other religious leaders will not be surprised to learn that those who contribute their time and financial resources to religious institutions are more likely to contribute to broad civic purposes as well. Religious leaders carefully cultivate the habit of sharing resources as an article of faithful witness and a matter of responsible living within civic society. The findings of this study offer evidence that such lessons are instructive to congregants in heretofore-unrecognized proportions. The finding that those who give to religious organizations are both more likely to give to secular organizations and to give more generously of both time and money should and will have important consequences for many aspects of our society.

In a moment in which “faith-based initiatives” are being debated as one means to provide services to needy populations, this report offers hard evidence of the religious community’s philosophic and material capacity for generosity and civic engagement.

Leaders of religious congregations will find this report not only satisfying but also an inducement to continue with their practices of cultivating generosity and involvement among their congregants. Real contributions to the well-being of our communities, the preservation of

our natural resources, and the very culture and people of our land are the beneficiaries of this great giving of resources.

As a seminary president I often sought contributions from for-profit corporations. Corporations may find in this study the evidence of broad community giving, which is often foundational to their own contributions. This study offers corporate philanthropy an opportunity to observe the scope and scale of such contributions in a broader context.

As General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, I am often asked by large benevolent organizations how they might gain better access to the vast infrastructure of American churches, especially to enlist the voluntary services of believers to aid the hungry and the homeless, the young and the elderly. In the light of the findings of *Faith and Philanthropy*, we should all redouble our efforts knowing that the resources are great and the intentions good among congregational participants to be wise stewards of their resources of time and money to serve the greater common good.

The goodness, which Tocqueville once linked to greatness, is in no short supply in today’s America, and INDEPENDENT SECTOR has enabled all of us to better understand how and where we might locate and direct it for purposes benevolent to all.