

# Recession woes hit church budgets

(AP) - God loves a cheerful giver is the message still being spread in the nation's pulpits, but such donors are becoming scarcer during a recession that has more people knocking on heaven's door for food and shelter.

The institution that fashions itself a city built upon a hill faces the same painful choices confronting governments, corporations and other more worldly groups as it seeks to fulfill its mandate to care for the poor, the hungry, the homeless and stay in business.

The sacrifices in tightening church budgets can be great.

The Rev. Robert Beck in Buffalo, N.Y., gave up his salary, then his secretary to keep his downtown church alive. His benefits — health insurance and housing and

car allowances — are his only compensation.

"That's the only reason we can handle the situation," said Beck, pastor of St. Paul's and St. Mark's United Church of Christ. "You find ways of doing it if you have to. That doesn't mean it's easy."

In Des Moines, Iowa, the head of a local ecumenical organization said it could easily spend double the \$2,000 a month it allocates to meet emergency expenses for the needy, but the funds are not there.

"You're getting caught at both ends," said the Rev. Forrest Harms, director of the Des Moines Area Religious Council.

"Not only do you have increasing needs on the part of the congregation and the community, at the same time you have diminishing resources to meet those

needs," he said.

Giving by church members in nine denominations increased by 5.7 percent in 1989, from \$345 to \$365 a member, according to the 1991 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches published by the National Council of Churches.

The Rev. Eric Shafer of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said recessionary fears have made people afraid of making large financial commitments.

"That fear that you hear about and read about is certainly prevalent in the church," Shafer said.

"Things are tough and things are tight. I detect people would like to do better for the church at large, but are just being cautious."

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