

# Faith communities contribute \$67B to Canada's economy, according to study

Religious Canadians and religious institutions have a massive impact – upwards of \$67 billion – on Canada's economy, according to a new economic impact study.

"The data are clear. Religion is a highly significant sector of Canada's economy," according to *The Hidden Economy: How Faith Helps Fuel Canada's GDP*, a report released by the Cardus religious think tank. "Religion provides purpose-driven institutional and economic contributions to health, education, social cohesion, social services, media, food and business itself."

According to *The Hidden Economy* – prepared by Brian and Melissa Grim, an American father-daughter research team with the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation – the faith community's annual contribution to Canadian society is worth an estimated \$67.5 billion a year.

"That's large enough to be the ninth-biggest enterprise in the country," the report concluded.

The report's findings show how important the religious sector is to the continuing economic health of the country, said Cardus executive vice-president Brian Dijkema. The economic impact benefits religious and non-religious Canadians alike and has a significant impact on the "common good of all."

"If religious activity is hindered – through zoning, regulation, taxation or even intolerance – there are massive economic spillover effects that negatively affect Canadians as a whole," Dijkema said. "We all benefit economically when religious life thrives."

More than half of the \$67.5-billion figure cited "comes from the activities of tens of thousands of religious congregations (churches, temples, mosques and synagogues) in Canada," Cardus said. "Nationwide, they have a \$35-billion 'halo effect' – the value congregations provide to their surrounding communities.

"The balance of religion's estimated \$67.5-billion contribution to Canadian society comes through activities related to schooling, health care systems, charities, media, lives saved through congregational substance abuse support programs, as well as kosher and halal food sales," Cardus said.

"Religion is an active force in the public, professional and personal lives of many in Canada."

The report acknowledges there are several important limitations of this study. It doesn't take into account the value of financial or physical assets of religious groups or the negative impacts that occur in some religious

communities.

In general it gives a starting point that can be used to further examine the economic impact of religion on Canada's economy.

"Despite these limitations, we believe that the data and estimates discussed in this paper will be a useful starting point for further studies of the socioeconomic contributions of religion to Canada and perhaps other countries as well," the report said.

"The faith sector is undoubtedly a significant component of the overall Canadian economy, affecting and involving the lives of the majority of the country's population," it added.

"Safeguards for religious freedom – including constitutional protection of freedom of conscience and religion as a fundamental right – help to ensure a dynamic religious marketplace, including the ability of each person to have a religion, change religions or have no religion at all."