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Inter-American Division > Communication Department

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28 Apr 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Edwin Manuel Garcia

You wouldn't know there's a global recession by the increase in tithe that some countries have experienced lately.

Seventh-day Adventists in the tiny Central American nation of Belize have boosted their tithing by 41 percent. In Asia, the nation of Bangladesh recorded a nearly 36 percent increase in tithe. And in the African country of Angola, tithing skyrocketed 489 percent in the past five years.

These findings are among the highlights of the recently released Global Tithe Index 2009 -- a database that compares tithe returns of about 100 countries after adjusting for economic factors specific to those nations.

Created by Claude Richli, an employee of the Adventist Church world headquarters with a self-proclaimed analytical mindset, the index seeks to explain how Adventists respond to their responsibility toward tithe-giving.

"The report tells the story of faithfulness around the world, in good times and in bad times," said Richli. "I believe that in some countries which have been blessed by extraordinary tithes, people's commitment has been deeper -- or even rekindled -- through the economic challenges the world has gone through."

Richli, director of marketing and associate publisher of the Adventist Review / Adventist World, has produced the index in his spare time since 2003, when he was associate executive secretary for the denomination's East-Central Africa Division, based in Nairobi.

The index can be a valuable tool for church leaders hoping to make decisions regarding policy making and planning, said Kenneth Swansi, chairman of the business department at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines.

The significance of the index, Swansi said, is that "it puts a common denominator in the tithing behavior," which can lead to useful comparisons.

"We've had some very good discussions in the classroom; we have looked at and dissected and discussed the tithing behavior from around the world," Swansi said, "and it is surprising sometimes that the most affluent people maybe are not the best when it comes to giving and tithing."

Richli, who holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from church-run Andrews University, compiles the index by relying on reference tools including the Seventh-day Adventist Statistical Report and the CIA world fact book. He also compares each country's Gross Domestic Product per capita with tithe per capita, and assigns a "GTI ratio" to each nation.

The best tithe giving countries are those with the lowest GTI ratios. The index shows Zimbabwe with the lowest ratio, 1.5, and India with the highest, at 127.4 (India's tithe dropped 5 percent).

The United States is ranked 41st of 103 countries, with a ratio of 5.9 and continuing to trend toward a higher ratio. Richli suspects the weakening state of giving may be due to church