

# Churches Versus Synagogues: Voluntary Donations Versus Dues



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Christian churches and Jewish synagogues rely on very different financing models, yet both “appear to raise about the same amount per member,” according to a [survey](#) conducted by the Jewish newspaper *The Forward* (article by **Josh Nathan-Kazis**). While synagogue members pay annual dues, churches rely primarily on voluntary donations from members.

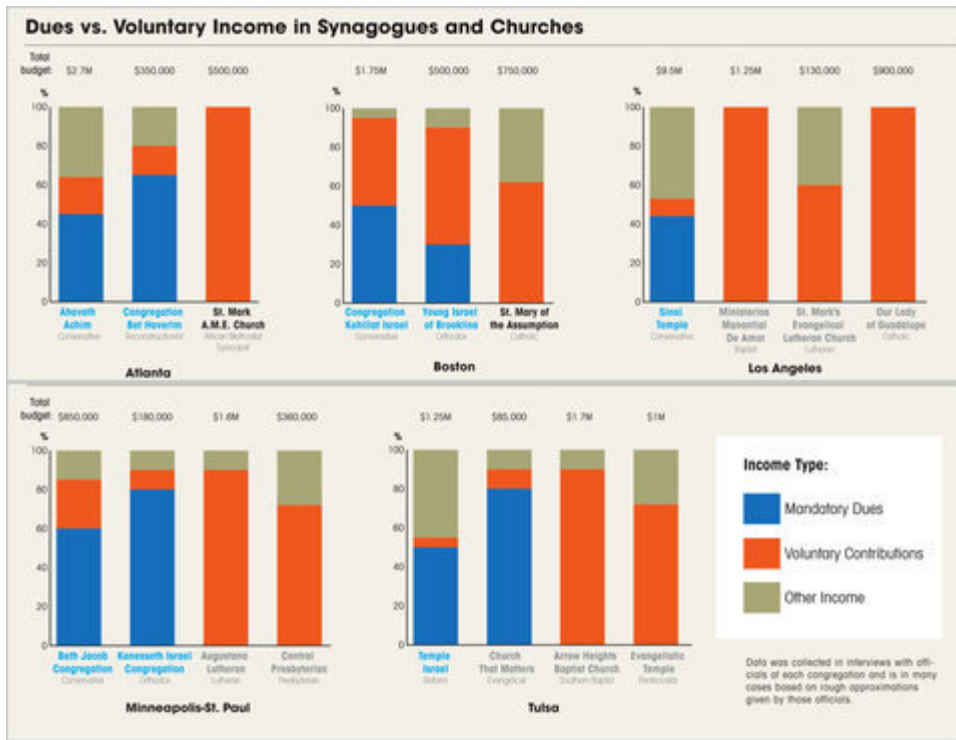
The *Forward* interviewed church and synagogue officials at institutions in Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, and Tulsa. Consider a comparison between a Conservative Jewish synagogue in Atlanta (Ahavath Achim) and an Episcopalian church in Manhattan (Church of the Heavenly Rest):

The two congregations are broadly comparable: Both serve slightly more than 1,000 middle- and upper-middle class households, have a multimillion-dollar endowment, employ about a dozen people and operate on an annual budget of \$2.7 million.

Both draw around half their income from regular fees paid by members. But, like virtually all American churches, Heavenly Rest does not charge dues. Like most synagogues, Ahavath Achim does.

At Ahavath Achim, those fees are assigned by the synagogue, with each family paying up to \$2,100 per year. Annual pledges at Heavenly Rest? As much, or as little, as you can give. While only one-third of member families participate in the church’s annual pledge drive, those that do give an average of \$2,700 – far more than the cost of dues at Ahavath Achim.

So one big difference between the two models is that giving in churches is much less evenly distributed than in synagogues. That said, a significant number of synagogue members give extra, as the charts below (where the orange represents voluntary giving) demonstrate. In fact, the executive director of a Conservative synagogue in Boston estimates that 95 percent of members give more than required.



Graphs courtesy of the *Forward*.

Given how easy it is to attend church services without donating anything at all, it's interesting that members of Christian churches give so generously. Do they do it for the "[warm glow](#)," or do churches have a different, less obvious, means of persuading people to donate?

The *Forward* has also put together some interesting statistics on how churches and synagogues [spend their money](#). Here's a preview: your parents will probably worry less if you become a rabbi than a priest ...

**TAGS:** [altruism](#), [religion](#)