

Online Giving at Your Church?



As our staff visits churches around the Conference, one question is asked invariably: “Should we offer online giving?”

In short, the answer is yes. As fewer Americans cash their paychecks or carry a checkbook, churches across the country are finding the online trend a necessity, in addition to passing the collection plate on Sunday.

In our own informal poll of the largest United Methodist Churches in the Louisiana Annual Conference, we found that 30 percent had some type of online giving. Unfortunately, of that 30 percent, some links were broken (did not work), some of the buttons were hidden two or more clicks into the website, and a few had vague wording, such as “Get Involved,” or a phrase that did not quite communicate what it was.

Mark Brooks of The Charis Group, a stewardship consulting company located in Suwanee, Ga., says churches should look into online platforms that charities like the American Red Cross use to collect donations. The online effort should also cater to people with smartphones.

The subsequent question we hear on this issue is, “How do we get started?”

We’ve looked into a few companies that offer online payment services, and found that Vanco Services seemed to have an easy set-up, reasonable costs and flexible terms. In a conversation with a Vanco representative, we found out that 13 United Methodist Churches in our conference use Vanco.



Vanco offers churches the ability to accept online giving and payments (registration for classes, for example) with any Internet connection, smartphone or tablet. Donors can give a one-time gift or set themselves up with a monthly draft. Administrators can access detailed and customized reports specifying the exact information they need about individual accounts, and all transactions are secure.

Rev. Bob Deich of First UMC, Denham Springs, whose church uses Vanco, finds that it helps to have more people on an automatic draft. “This not only stabilizes income, but also increases giving. If for no other reason, but that gifts are not forgotten or passed up due to vacations, etc.,” he says.

Financial Secretary Linda McDaniel, also of First Denham Springs, has no complaints with Vanco. “The start-up seemed to go well and changes made to accounts have always gone smoothly,” she says. First Denham Springs has been using Vanco since 2009, and started with two online givers. The current percentage of members using online service is eight to ten percent, and McDaniel finds that people are more consistent with their giving because they don’t have to remember to bring their checkbook to the service.

Setting up with Vanco takes approximately one week, and a Vanco representative is available to help you through all the steps. For more information and pricing, go to www.vancoservices.com.

There are several online giving services organizations out there, but we found Vanco to be the most responsive.

If you decide to implement online giving on your church's website, Brooks suggests these few tips:

- Focus on making your website attractive to get donations. Statistics show you have seven seconds to keep people interested.
- Include videos and images on your website that communicate your mission to persuade people to contribute money.
- Make the giving button easy to find, clearly marked "Online Giving" or something similar.
- Drive people to the giving button through all other communication tools, such as newsletter, bulletin, and social media.

By Kelly Johannessen, Director of Communications, United Methodist Foundation of Louisiana