

If Everybody Gives Online, Do We Still Pass the Plate?

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We have a problem in today’s local church. A problem that only grows larger with each technological advance, and each time we fail to properly communicate about it.

Technology has the potential to make the offering irrelevant.

The offering—that moment in our worship services where we give back to God what God has so richly given us—is becoming an awkward question mark.



The offering can be a time to reflect on giving, even if the physical act of giving doesn’t happen in that moment.

With online and mobile giving, text-to-give functionality, giving kiosks in the lobby, automated giving directly from your bank account, and more, giving has become quicker, easier, and more convenient than ever before.

You can be a consistent and faithful giver without every taking a dime to church and placing it in the offering plate.

The speed and convenience these emerging technologies have provided are undeniable. But this convenience has also brought a measure of awkwardness, or at least uncertainty, to the offering portion of the corporate worship gathering:

- What do you do during the offering if you’ve already given through some technological method?
- Does the designated time for giving devolve into a mere formality in which only a few participate?
- Is the physical act of giving still even a relevant and essential part of the corporate worship experience?

Giving Basics

Let’s consider a few things about giving itself:

First, giving is an act of worship. Whether it happens by physically placing cash in the offering plate or by the automatic transfer of ones and zeroes, that act of worship is still important in the life of a Christian.

Secondly, giving is a priority for ministry. Giving fuels the life of the church, whether we're talking about dollars to keep the lights on or time to prepare the service.

Thirdly, all of God's people should be welcome and invited to give, regardless of their preferred method.

The offering can be a time to communicate these priorities and reflect on giving, even if the physical act of giving doesn't technically happen during that moment.

Communicators should work with their leadership to develop a solution that not only honors and accommodates all the ways people prefer to donate their funds, but also doesn't allow the set time of giving during the worship experience to become a formality.

One Way Forward

I am personally familiar with such a solution that can be easily implemented by any ministry. The church my family and I began attending is led by a tech-enthusiast baby boomer and is attended by people of all generations. People give using nearly every form available—cash, check, debit card, and through an online platform.

The pastor provides a five-minute teaching every Sunday on stewardship, along with a prayer and an affirmation that the congregation recites out loud prior to presenting the offering. Additionally, on certain Sundays, when applicable, he does vision casting and talks about things that are happening at the church and in the community, both short-term and long-term projects, that require continued faithful giving.

Just in these simple ways, he eliminates the formality and establishes a culture of giving that will persist, regardless of how many people give at the designated offering time. **The offering becomes more than a time to physically give, but a time to reflect on why we give and be thankful for all that has been given to us.**

It is in these ways—teaching and vision casting—that the offering time can always be essential to the worship experience, no matter how technology enhances the donation process.

Set the Tone

At the end of the day, giving and the attitude toward it are all about setting the tone for what people should expect in worship. If a loving and caring environment is fostered where people are treated like human beings in the community of faith, no matter how much money they give and how they choose to give it, and if giving is treated as a true act of worship, then the offering time will never become a formality.