

The Offering Plate Has Left the Building
Getting Started with Electronic Giving
Central/Southern Illinois Synod
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Why should a congregation consider electronic giving options?

Way of the Future

Handling money electronically is the way of the future. Cash and check transactions continue to decline, whereas credit and debit cards and ACH transactions are increasing. Most givers under 50 rarely carry much cash or a checkbook. (Many under 30 do not even have a checkbook!) Electronic giving options makes it more likely these givers will make an offering because they can give without a check, cash or offering envelope. These are people who are used to making electronic transactions and having electronic giving options increases the likelihood they will give an offering both now, and in the future. Additionally, data suggests that nearly 50% of those 65 and older have smartphones and already pay many of their bills electronically, so many of them may be willing to give electronically.

Ease of Giving

Electronic giving options offer *more* ways to give and *easy* ways to give. That is, electronic giving maximizes opportunities disciples have to give. Whether people worship online Sunday morning or Saturday evening or at 1:00 AM, they can still make an offering. Online worship may also bring us worshippers from near and far, and they may want to also support your congregation's ministry.

In pre-pandemic times, we recognized that "regular" worship attendance is declining. Whereas "regular worship attendance" used to mean nearly every week, for more and more people "regular" attendance means worshipping one to two times per month. If a congregation relies solely on the offering plate, there are missed opportunities to remind people to share in the congregation's work through their financial gifts. Electronic giving offers people the ability to support the congregation's ministry while away at a soccer tournament or on vacation without having to find an envelope or stamp.

Good Stewardship

Disciples are encouraged to practice good stewardship, which includes being intentional about being a part of God's work of ministry through the church and being generous. When people give electronically, they are given the option to make their gift a regular recurring transaction. Setting up a recurring transaction gives disciples another way to show their ongoing commitment to ministry in Jesus' name and steward their resources for God's work. The regularity of recurring gifts also has the benefit of stabilizing the congregation's income. Offerings come in whether or not people are in the pews. The regularity of income allows congregation leaders to plan well for ministry.



What is electronic giving?

Electronic giving includes several ways disciples can make offerings to a congregation's ministry.

- Bill Pay – Individuals may contact their bank to set up an automatic "bill pay," to the church. The bank writes a check to the church. While this is easy (and electronic) for individuals, it does still result in a physical check sent to the church which needs to be handled by counters.
- Giving on a computer, either through a congregation's website, through a giving portal, or through another vendor like Pay Pal
- Giving through an app on a smartphone
- Texting to give
- Giving at a physical kiosk machine, or a mobile card reader device



How can a congregation incorporate electronic giving as an option for disciples?

While a congregation can set up Pay Pal, the ELCA has agreements with two online giving vendors, Tithe.ly and GivePlus. We are not salespeople for GivePlus or Tithe.ly, but these agreements do reduce the costs for ELCA congregations. For example, there are no monthly, annual, or contract fees with them, and transaction costs are lower than without the ELCA agreement.

Signing up with Tithe.ly or GivePlus gives your disciples the ability to make a single donation or set up an account to give recurring offerings. Givers can log in, track their giving history, or make adjustments to their recurring transactions at any time. Payments can be made by ACH bank account transactions, debit card, or credit card, and congregations have the option whether or not to accept credit cards. All this can be done on a computer, with or without a congregation website, or by using Tithe.ly or GivePlus's smartphone apps. A giving portal can easily be added to your congregation website. Both vendors offer options for texting to give, card readers, or kiosks, though these come with additional costs, so a congregation should consider whether those options seem reasonable.



What are the advantages of the two ELCA-preferred vendors and transaction fees?

GivePlus (Vanco)

<https://www.giveplus.com/elca>

No monthly, annual, or contract fees

Transaction fees (as of May 1, 2020):

- ACH/echeck - 0.8% + 35 cents/transaction
- Visa/Mastercard - 2.35% + 35 cents/transaction
- Amex - 3.5% + 35 cents/transaction

Notes:

- Ability to create multiple funds to allow designated giving
- Slightly more involved setup process
- Extremely detailed reporting capabilities
- Secure giving site linked from your website
- Supports mobile giving
- Formerly connected with SimplyGiving from Thrivent, which means current SimplyGiving disciples do not have to change their account information.

Tithe.ly

<https://get.tithe.ly/elca>

No monthly, annual, or contract fees

Transaction fees (as of May 1, 2020):

- ACH/echeck - 0.5% + 25 cents/transaction
- Visa/Mastercard - 2.4% + 25 cents/transaction
- Amex - 3.5% + 25 cents/transaction

Notes:

- Ability to create multiple funds to allow designated giving
- Fast setup process
- Simple reports
- Secure giving site linked from your website
- Supports mobile giving
- Tithe.ly has recently rolled out additional paid products including reasonably priced website design, church app, messaging, and church management software.



Common concerns about electronic giving:

Cost

The costs associated with GivePlus and Tithe.ly (or other vendors like PayPal) are in transaction fees, unless a congregation decides to add text to give, kiosk, or a card reader.

Congregations should plan to be transparent with givers that there are these associated fees, and that fees for bank account transactions (ACH) are significantly less than credit cards. A congregation can choose whether to absorb the fees out of their operating budget (decreasing the impact of giver's gifts), or to allow givers the opportunity to offset the cost of the transaction fee themselves. Typically, generous givers are more than glad to cover the transaction fees themselves when given the opportunity.

Sample costs of three Tithe.ly givers

Giver One \$1,196 annually
\$23/week by ACH
\$23.37/transaction
x 52 weeks = \$1,215.24
\$19.24 in fees

Giver Two \$1,200 annually
\$100/month by ACH
\$100.75/transaction
x 12 months = \$1,209.00
\$9.00 in fees

Giver Three \$1,200 annually
\$300/quarterly by credit card
\$307.45/transaction
x 4 quarters = \$1,229.80
\$29.80 in fees

When electronic giving options are easy (available on a smartphone or church website) people are more likely to make use of it and give more regularly than they may have before. Many churches have found the regularity and increased offerings offsets the cost.

Security

Tithe.ly and GivePlus follow industry standards for financial procedures and your financial information is secure. No one in the congregation has access to your account information, only a record of what you have given.

Offering as an Act of Worship

Some people are concerned that not physically putting something in the offering plate misses the worshipful nature of an offering, and making an offering is indeed an act of worship. Online offering can still happen during the offering time during worship. The landscape of givers is changing, and we will need to find new ways to acknowledge our offerings before God, whether done during worship in the church, online worship, or through recurring transactions.



Final Thoughts

And remember that the desire to give to God and financially support ministry extends beyond just the time of worship. Electronic giving allows disciples to give from wherever they are, and at any time the Spirit moves them. Thank you so much for the ministry you do in sharing the good news and hope of Jesus with your community!

For ideas about how to make the most of electronic giving options, see the resource “Tips and Tools for Electronic Giving” at www.csis-elca.org/stewardship.

For more information about electronic giving or for other stewardship conversations contact Pastor Elise Rothfusz, Director for Evangelical Mission, Central/Southern Illinois Synod. Pastor Elise is available to meet by video conference with congregation councils or stewardship committees. 217-494-3043 or elise.rothfusz@csis-elca.org