

## Online Giving

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

I like to give an offering during the worship service as an act of worship. However, there are also times when it is really convenient to be able to give online. I can do it immediately when I realize I cannot get to my church that day. When I want to give directly to the synod or the ELCA, I can. Like everyone, I have a lot of things to remember and to do. When giving online I can skip several steps that are involved in bringing in or mailing a check.

When you shop do you use cash and checks or credit card? A credit card is useful when you want to give more, and frankly, I am saving miles on my card so I can get to Australia. Others may be more generous with a credit card for reasons that are also less pure; like still waiting for their pay check to come through. What is important about online giving is the option. How many giving options does your church have?

Steve Oelschlager, Stewardship Program Coordinator, ELCA, writes: In 2014 the ELCA launched an effort to help congregations get over the hump of starting with online giving. We said we would cover the monthly fees for one year so congregations could give it a try. We had about 130 congregations take us up on the offer. 104 were already using the paper based system where a person had to fill out a form in order to give electronically. The remaining 24 congregations had no electronic capability. With the initiative, all congregations could process gifts through their website without people needing to fill out a paper form. The 24 congregations that started with no electronic giving are now averaging \$2,800/month. The average ACH gift was \$110 and the average credit card gift was \$175. About 8% of giving activity originated from smart phones or mobile devices.

Here is what we learned from phone calls afterwards:

- Need an internal champion/leader/problem solver. Likewise, internal dissent can cause problems.
- Need to advertise often and in a variety of ways including “I give electronically pew cards”
- People like the simplicity. Those who travel in winter and summer like to put their giving on autopilot.
- Many people will pay credit card transaction fees if you give them the option

Ways we publicized:

- In newsletter regularly and in bulletins with QR code so smart phones can be used
- As part of stewardship campaign, on reverse of pledge card you could sign up
- Temple talk/ testimony in worship once or twice
- Did a live demo at Council meeting using laptop and screen.
- Vanco gives sample articles which we adapted

<https://www.simplygivingbythriventcu.com> As you scroll down on the right is a link to sign up. Vanco has great customer service if anyone has questions.

“I don’t have hard numbers, but I will say that in my estimation, it only takes one person who gives a generous pledge to make up for the cost of the various automatic online giving options. Even when someone pledges to give throughout the year, often a vacation or health issues result in a skipped month of donations. With the automatic giving, there is no gap in the contributions. So one person who gave an additional \$275 (by not missing a month) would make up for the transaction fee we pay to Vanco for the entire year. I definitely think it is a worthwhile program to set up.” Loris Stupel Financial Secretary St Mark’s Lutheran church

Maybe this summer while a decrease in giving is “hot” as people go on vacation, you could more easily make the case to set up online giving so that you are ready for the Fall and for year-end gifts.

