

beyond the offering plate

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Throughout history, American churches have tried all sorts of ways to raise money, including renting pews and public subscription which highlighted wealth inequality, and lotteries and raffles which were later criticized as gambling. Then, in the early twentieth century, came the practice of passing the plate. This was a great improvement over the previous methods used to raise money, and, in time, became the most powerful fundraising tool used by the church.

In recent days, though, collection plates have become less popular. We have been in a technological revolution for some time now, which has resulted in many alternative ways to give. Yet, most churches still use the collection plate as their primary fundraising tool. Why? Because the passing of the plate is still seen by many as an act of worship. That is a good thing. Christians say, “We aren’t just supporting an organization, we are giving to God.” Yet, considering the current environment, can we not give to God by other means?

We know that the message of the Church is eternal and that will not change. Yet *how* we do church must continually change. Since we are in the midst of a technological and communications revolution, we must embrace it or be left behind. The 21st century is driven by technology and information. Let’s look at a few facts about technology and change.

First, **technology is theologically neutral**. It is not a bad thing. Rather than fear technology, we will have to learn to embrace it. Second, **change is inevitable**. Wise organizations, including the Church, realize that they must continually reinvent themselves. The Church must learn not to fear change. Even cultural changes can be met without compromising our

theology and principles. Change must be met by the Church with a positive message of hope and stability.

In speaking with several Church Administrators from CBF churches, I have found that a substantial number of members at many churches are now using bank drafts as their primary giving tool, which is a good thing for churches. As attendance becomes more and more erratic, it ensures that the funds necessary for the church to continue to join God in work and worship will continue to be received on a regular basis. Many older members are using IRA contributions. The church must provide information about this type of giving and encourage its members to give in a manner that can help both them and the church.

Additionally, every church needs to offer online giving. While most report that this method of giving represents a smaller percentage of their gifts, younger generations expect and need this option. Many people no longer carry much (if any) cash and an increasing number of folks no longer use checks.

Yet, as churches embrace these changing ways to give, the question still needs to be asked, “How do we make giving a worshipful experience?” There is more than one right answer, and passing the plate should be one option. What may be worship to one may not be to another.

Much of giving and worship is simply what we are accustomed to, which is constantly changing in this fast-paced society. The primary focus of Christians should always be that these gifts are being offered to God, no matter how we give them.