

e-Giving is 40 percent of the donation plate at this Midwestern church

Here are the success strategies that got them there



Constance Evangelical Free Church has roots in Andover Minnesota that go back more than 130 years, beginning with a Sunday School that led to the formation in 1893 of the Free Church of God, later known as Constance Community Church. Today, Constance Evangelical Free Church is a robust modern ministry with an average attendance of 1500 each Sunday.

About Jeff Piehl:

Jeff has undergraduate degrees in agriculture and business, an MBA, and a Masters of Divinity. He served as a youth pastor for 30 years in four other churches before joining the Constance Evangelical Free Church pastoral team in the capacity of church business administrator.

Constance Evangelical Free Church was an early adopter of electronic giving. Church Business Administrator, Jeff Piehl, says the church began using e-Giving in 1998 with an ACH (electronic funds transfer) option for members. In the beginning, they made a presentation at the annual business meeting, and put a lot of blurbs in the church program and on the website. "We emphasized how people pay their water bill online and that they could use the same convenience for tithes and offerings. Later, we added a QR code to communications that took people directly to the giving website. It provided a helpful link for people to scan and go right to our giving page."

Today, the church also offers text giving, credit card options and most recently, a smartphone giving option. Jeff says one of the main benefits to e-Giving is how much it has evened out giving during summer months. "Our giving in the summer now goes down just marginally which helps us to better budget and plan our programs throughout the year."

So how do you get from zero e-Giving to it becoming such a substantial portion of the donation plate?

Jeff shares the strategies that led to e-Giving success:

Leadership from the pulpit is paramount. If you want more e-Giving investment from members, church leaders need to make the case. It was very powerful for members to hear our senior pastor talk about how he pays virtually all of his bills online and contributes online. All six of our pastors took the time to champion our electronic giving options to the various groups in our church, explaining how it helps the church with budgeting, and helps with convenience.

Don't count out seniors. Our demographics are getting a bit older with 20 percent of our regular attendees less than 25 years old and then evenly split in age groups 25-50, and 50-80. We did not find it more difficult to get seniors to adopt electronic giving. We have an active seniors ministry, which received e-Giving information at one of their meetings. With most seniors being used to getting retirement benefits electronically and looking at pictures of their grandkids online, it was easy for them to adopt. Offering electronic giving options makes it easier for them to keep their giving intentions.

Offer e-Giving options for special funds. While the weekly donation is the most used form of e-Giving at our church, members are also using electronic giving to support special funds. It has provided a convenient method for members to donate quickly to missions and other projects they want to support.

Track your e-Giving programs. Vanco's reporting options provide good information that helps us understand the state of the donation plate in general and allows us to easily track separate funds.

e-Giving security and administration. We find e-Giving more secure because donor information is not in physical file cabinets that could be broken into, and because we are handling less cash. It has also automated many administrative tasks, opening up time for other efforts.

Finding the right e-Giving partner. Ask for recommendations from other churches. When researching potential partners, Vanco came up as a reliable and trusted e-Giving provider.

What about smartphones? The church created a smartphone app, which incorporates and takes advantage of Vanco's mobile giving options. It is amazing how many people on Sunday morning use their phones to practice generosity even when they are physically passing the plate. In addition, the app gives those worshipping online a way to give during the offertory.

Is e-Giving attracting new givers or just replacing the method of giving by existing supporters?

"e-Giving is definitely growing the donation plate and attracting new givers who appreciate the convenience. It was interesting to watch the members respond to the QR code we put in the church program. Across age groups, many thought it was cool and used it just to see if it worked. That's how some started to become e-Givers, and in some cases, regular givers for the first time. Let me share an example of how e-Giving is attracting previous non-givers or sporadic givers. There is a person in our church who meets every weekend with a small group of men. During each meeting, he has made it a habit to give online. If he did not have this option, he may not have become such a reliable giver."

- Jeff Piehl, Constance Evangelical Free Church



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