

Whether or not to pass a bag or plate...

Offertory collections developed in the days when people were paid weekly in notes and coins. These days most people's income comes through bank accounts, including pensions and social security benefits. For many people, it is easier to give by bank standing order, as it saves finding the right change each week. It also helps people gradually to increase their regular giving from year to year in line with inflation, without everyone having to find odd amounts of cash every week. Switching to standing orders:

- improves the regularity and consistency of church income
- cuts the volunteer time needed to open and check the envelopes after the service
- minimises the risks involved in weekly cash banking
- cuts stationery costs - dated envelope sets are fairly expensive
- helps the church to budget and manage its finances more effectively, and
- bank statements provide an independent audit trail for the Inland Revenue.

However, there is something very significant about money representing us – what we do with our money defines us and our priorities. The offering of money within the context of worship provides an opportunity for a symbolic offering of ourselves and our resources. The National Stewardship Committee encourages parishes to review whether or not it's right for them to continue to pass an offertory bag during the service.

Benefits of passing a bag:

- Everyone is physically involved in liturgical action
- Visible symbol of gratitude to God
- Offers the opportunity to explain what is going on and why
- Better described as "receiving an offering" rather than "taking an collection"
- Can use (recyclable) "My Gift to God" tokens for standing order givers to put in.

But

- Can imply a small cash gift is all that is required for generous giving
- Can be embarrassing for newcomers who are unprepared
- Some people find it interrupts their worship or singing.

Benefits of having a plate at the back:

- Less obtrusive within worship liturgy for newcomers who may feel uncomfortable
- No need to organise sidespeople or collectors
- Promotes electronic giving
- Easier for people to give at realistic levels via standing order, and to adjust this with periodic cash donations when needed.

But

- Some churches may worry that they will "lose out" (in fact, most churches gain by stressing standing orders)
- May be a security concern if the plate is left unattended.

Whether or not a bag or plate is passed around during worship, it can still be brought forward so that the gifts of God's people are offered as a part of the worship.