

Tithes and Offerings in Uncertain Times

How can churches encourage giving, even when there is no physical offering? Adam Dyer, leader of Yeovil Community Church; Nick Amis, Cinnamon Advisor; and Sjoerd van Oort from technology company Givt, share their insight and experience to help churches maintain giving.

In the last two weeks nearly a million claims were made for Universal Credit. Trussell Trust anticipates that they'll provide in excess of 360,000 meals over the next three months. Alongside this, charities are expecting to see income fall by £4billion in 12 months.

Financially, our nation is facing greater challenges than ever before. In the midst of this, churches who rely on weekly offerings are, understandably, worried about their future.

Biblical Mandate

It's impossible to generalise about the experience of individual churches. In our nation there are congregations that meet in front rooms and those that hire out London theatres. Every situation is different, every circumstance unique.

At a time when our natural instinct is to build up our own storehouses and cling on to what they have, the Bible tells us to do quite the opposite. There's no getting around the fact that God calls his Church to be generous – especially in times of trial. The antidote to 'not enough' is actually 'to give'.

As Christians, we're called:

- to tithe (Leviticus 27:30)
- to give our first fruits to the Lord (Nehemiah 10:35)
- to consider the poor (Luke 12:33)

In a culture that calls us to shrink back and protect what we have, the Bible calls us to be bold and generous. Rather than asking ourselves, "Have I got enough" we should be asking "What have I got?" For most of us, the answer is usually "something". And when we put all our "somethings" together, we've got quite a lot.



Take Stock

This doesn't mean we carry on regardless. There are dramatic changes taking place in our country, our communities and our congregations. We as churches do need to adapt the way we're operating to ensure we are good stewards of all we've been given.

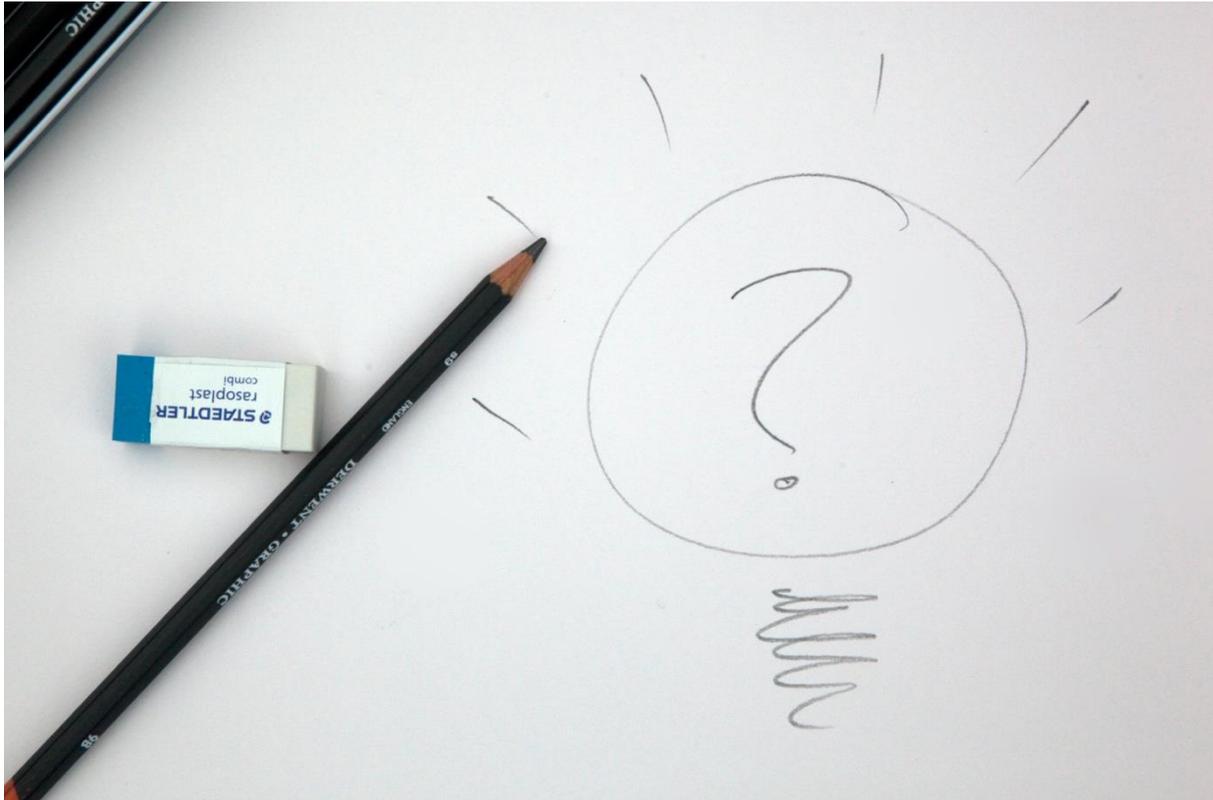
There are difficult decisions that need to be made in order to prioritise support and secure the vital services that churches provide. If your church relies on the offering to pay rent, bills, salaries, support missionaries and fund social action projects, you need to take stock of your income and outgoings.

You need to decide what's most important right now.

- Where are your priorities?
- Where do you need staff?
- Where do you need resources?
- What's not essential?

The [government's furlough scheme](#) is available to churches. So, if you have salaried staff that aren't performing essential frontline services, they can be furloughed and will receive 80% of their salary up to £2,500, from the UK government.

It's worth noting that, while on furlough, staff won't be able to work for you, even in a voluntary capacity. Of course, they'll continue to play an important part of your church family and your care and support for them will be important.



Communicate Clearly

Everyone is aware that these are unprecedented times. But if you want your congregation to get behind what you're doing – financially, prayerfully and compassionately – then they'll need to understand your bigger vision.

People want to see how their contribution will make a difference to the much bigger plan that God has for your community and your country. As a church be clear about your vision and how you're going to achieve it.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What's the current situation?
- Where is there greatest need?
- What are we called to do about it?



Facilitate Giving

To achieve your vision, you're going to need financial support. Whether you have seen giving decline or not, the way you're 'doing church' has certainly changed. Within this new normality, it's important that your congregation understand that giving remains something that we as Christians are called to do.

The reality is, giving is far more than a transaction; it's something we do in community with one another as part of our worship. It's pretty hard to replicate that when your congregants are sitting at home watching a live stream of the Sunday sermon, or flicking through the order of service that's been circulated via email.

Look for ways to include giving as part of your "new norm". You could consider:

- Taking a moment for an offering during the live stream where people can give online, or via something like PayPal
- Providing standing order details to your congregants in your service orders
- Encouraging people to put cash aside each week, which you can collect when lockdown is over
- Getting small group leaders to help cash givers set up donations
- Looking at alternative technology such as Givt

Remember that it's not just a case of giving people a way to give, you need to give people a reason to give as well. As we all reassess our priorities and look to support our communities, make sure your church understands your vision.



Harnessing technology

The current crisis has forced churches across the country to rethink the way they do church. We've all had to get up to speed with technologies that were never on our radar. This current situation may provide a great opportunity to introduce new giving methods.

Many of your congregation may already have moved to a cashless lifestyle, so now could be a good opportunity to catch up with them.

- Consider setting up a [PayPal](#) account to collect donations
- The [Church of England](#) has advice on text giving and church management apps
- Take a look at [Givt](#), an app that has been set up specifically to help individuals give to their churches using their smart phones. Our recent Cinnamon Connect Webinar includes a detailed insight into how Givt works.

Radical love

Perhaps it goes without saying that there will be those within your congregations who are facing very serious financial challenges – of course, you'll need to make sure you're supporting them individually with great sensitivity and compassion.

With the great uncertainty and anxiety in our nation, people are looking to the church. Now is the time for the church to reach out to the least and the lost within our communities. In times of crisis, we need radical love; that takes courage, faith and finances. Let's look to be generous with everything God has given us, including our money.

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly,

so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:7-8