

Return to Physical Worship and the Offering

While written with Communities of Faith in mind, this document offers value to a much broader audience. Please take and use what makes sense for your own context.

As we prepare to re-engage with each other and return to in-person ministry and church activities, the importance of providing a safe and healthy experience and environment is vital. Each community of faith will need to keep themselves informed of local, provincial, and federal government procedures and restrictions. Each Regional Council may also have its own policies in place. In all things, please consult with your local public health unit for direction.

As in-person worship resumes, the challenges of controlling personal contact in order to limit possible disease sharing is critical. “Business as usual” will not be possible. Some practices can be modified. Some practices will need to end. Some new practices will need to be created. This is a good time to review your entire worship experience, from curb to curb.

One worship practice that MUST be modified for safety is the offering. No one wants to receive an offering plate after other people have handled it, breathed on it, and possibly infected it.

Most communities of faith will need to offer both physical and on-line options for financial giving.

Recommendations for safety:

- Know your context. Review your worship practices through the lens of COVID-19.
- Whenever possible, use no-contact alternatives for receiving the offering.
- Cash offerings must be in envelopes. No loose offerings.
- Offering counters should practice physical distancing. Stay at least two meters apart when counting and wear protective gloves or use hand sanitizer often.
- Identify and thank those offering counters who are in COVID-19 vulnerable groups and replace them until the danger of contracting the virus has passed.
- Offering plates/box being brought forward for dedication during worship, should be wiped with disinfectant and ushers should wear protective gloves and/or use hand sanitizer before and afterwards. The minister doesn't have to touch the offering plates. After the dedication, ushers can take the offering plates/boxes straight out of the worship space to a secure location or place them on the communion table.

Recommended methods to receive gifts (in preferred order):

1. Encourage signing up for Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) to make a consistent monthly transfer from the donor bank account to the community of faith bank account. Details and sign up forms for PAR are found here: <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/get-involved/giving-monthly-through-par>
2. Use CanadaHelps for On-line giving. Register at www.canadahelps.org to “claim your page” then promote your link for people to make on-line donations using their credit card. More detailed information is found here: https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/canadahelps_information_for_united_church_ministries.pdf

3. E-transfer directly to the community of faith bank account, if the community of faith has set it up with their bank. Each bank has its own rules and challenges. Please talk to your local branch manager.
4. Encourage using post-dated cheques, mailed to the community of faith. One mailing takes care of many months of consistent giving and reduces contact.
5. Offering plate/box placed in a convenient location for people to use before or during worship with minimal physical contact & ongoing social distancing. **We currently DO NOT RECOMMEND passing the offering plate through the congregation.**

More details on these methods can be found at: <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/congregational-finances-and-covid-19>

Best practices around the offering:

- Have an inspiring offering invitation which links giving and generosity to discipleship and faith and gives a brief example of how people's gifts are making a difference and doing God's mission.
- The offering dedication prayer during worship should follow the offering, be addressed to God, give thanks to God for what God has given and that we have the privilege of also giving, and mentions those gifts that are not physically present like PAR and on-line giving.
- Allow enough time during the offering for on-line giving to take place.
- Provide a web-link for people to donate on-line through CanadaHelps.
- Provide a QSR code for people to scan with their smart phone and donate on-line through CanadaHelps.