



THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

ISSUE VII JANUARY-MARCH 2013

The Faithful Servant is a ministry of Faith Church in Salem, KY.

Understanding The Offering

What's really happening at the usher's most visible moment

1 Corinthians 16:2

By Mark Galli

Many ushers see the offering as one of their primary responsibilities. This article explains the offering and why it is structured the way that it is. As you read it, consider how the manner in which your church takes a collection reflects the values and emphases of your church.

The offering is, perhaps, the most fundamental act of Christian worship. It's certainly one of the oldest, having been part of Israel's worship from earliest times. Upon entering Canaan, the people were told to offer the firstborn of their livestock as a thanksgiving (Ex. 13:11-12), and (as we read of New Testament history) the collection of money was a part of early Christian worship.



The offering is part of the service where people formally dedicate themselves--'offer' themselves--to God anew. Since how we spend money is close to who we are, the giving of money has become the key symbol of 'offering ourselves as a living sacrifice.'

A Variety of Offerings

There are three principle ways in which churches give the opportunity for people to offer their gifts:

Offering box. Some churches place boxes at the back of the church so that

people can simply deposit their offerings as they enter or leave. This answers the objections of those who think the passing of plates is merely a way to collect money from a captive audience. The offering box also emphasizes the individual's offering of his or her gifts to God.

Passing the plate.

Most churches pass offering plates or bags among people in the pews. Since the passing of the plates is preceded or concluded with a public prayer of dedication, this method emphasizes public thanksgiving... >>

1 Corinthians 14:40

“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

By James Brown, Head Usher

From the beginning God established his plan in an orderly fashion. Should His children not follow His example and give back to Him a life that is dedicated in selfless worship?



Giving God our best as ushers starts with a prayer-filled spirit, a clean, well-dressed appearance, and a heart with a compassion to serve. As a representation of a servant of the Lord, ushers should be dressed a notch or two above the average church goer. A suit or jacket and tie is appropriate when greeting at the door, taking up an offering, or when serving communion. Stay together in a unified fashion while passing the offering plates or distributing communion sacraments. Be aware of your surroundings and be ready to assist when you are needed. God is pleased when we give our best to Him. Should He expect any less from us?

[FS]

Passing the plate (Cont.)

and dedication, and more consciously ties the spiritual and physical aspects of faith.

Placing on the table.

Occasionally (perhaps on a stewardship Sunday or soon after), members of the congregation can individually walk forward and place their offerings in offering plates placed at the front of the sanctuary. This takes a greater step of faithfulness, requiring people to walk forward.

Attention to Details

If the church decides to pass plates--the usual procedure--a number of decisions must be made.

What to do with guests.

Some churches announce that visitors, as guests, needn't feel obliged to give. Others think that since the offering is founded in thanksgiving and aimed toward God, no one is a guest, so all should be invited to express thanks and dedication.



What to do before and after.

Leaders are wise to craft how they announce the offering, making sure to highlight not the duty of 'having to give' but the privilege of giving thanks in this way. Some make use of Paul's encouragement: "Each one of you must give as you have made up your

mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves the cheerful giver." Since this form of offering emphasizes the public and corporate nature of the act, a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication usually accompanies it.

What the people do.

While the ushers collect the offering, the congregation can simply sit in silence, using the time to pray and reflect on ways they can dedicate themselves anew to God. Sometimes the choir or a soloist will sing, not as a way to entertain people during a lull in the service, but as a song-offering to God. Often the organist plays quietly, concluding the piece soon after the ushers are ready to come forward, but not stopping abruptly (which would signal that, in fact, the organ was mere filler).

Where to put the plates.

After the plates are passed, they can simply be taken out of the sanctuary. Many churches think it

better, however, to bring them forward as an act of public thanksgiving and commitment, with the congregation joining in a hymn of praise, usually some form of the doxology. Often the plates are placed on the Communion table, showing publicly the tie between the spiritual and physical, reminding the worshipers of the Incarnation of our Lord. [FS]