

Church of England goes cashless for worshipers' contributions

With fewer people carrying cash, churches plan to use special card readers for collecting fees and the offering.

by [Catherine Pepinster](#) in the [June 6, 2018](#) issue



Robb Sutherland, of Holy Nativity Church in West Yorkshire, England, with a contactless payment machine. Photo courtesy of Robb Sutherland.

A plan is under way in the Church of England to skip the offering plates and baskets and instead receive cashless payments in its 16,000 churches and cathedrals.

The payment machines will first be used for transactions such as paying funeral fees or for wedding notices. Later, people will also be able to make their weekly offering with the machines.

After a trial carried out in 40 Anglican churches last year, the plan will be used in all dioceses. The idea took root because declining numbers of people use cash.

“How we pay for things is changing fast, especially for younger churchgoers who no longer carry cash, and we want all generations to be able to make the most of their place of worship,” said John Preston, the Church of England’s national stewardship

officer. “Installing this technology does mean that one-off fees can be done via card, as can making one-off donations.”

Contactless payment, which allows a person to “tap and pay” rather than swiping or inserting a card, has been widely adopted across Europe.

One British church keen to embrace the new technology is Holy Nativity in Mixenden, on the outskirts of Halifax in West Yorkshire. Its vicar, Robb Sutherland, said that “it was so easy to set up . . . even someone with no technical knowledge could have it up and running in ten minutes.”

Holy Nativity has a rock mass on the third Sunday every month, complete with a live rock band, smoke and lights, processions, and incense.

“I can see that congregation being really up for trying something new,” Sutherland said. “The rock mass does tend to have a lot of people who only come to church for that service.”

Now he is working on making contactless payment always available at the back of the church for special events such as baptisms and other large services.

A special reader that can be passed around for the collection during church services will be tested out soon in the Church of England. Although some churches will welcome it, others think it is not for them because the amount of cash they currently take in is so small that buying the contactless system and running it will not be worthwhile.

The Church of England receives around £580 million (\$820 million) in donations each year, mostly through regular contributions.

Matthew Cashmore, based at All Saints Church in Hereford near the border with Wales, said, “We decided not to do it because of the cost, and most of our collection comes through standing orders.”

Others say it will help with another problem for rural churches: the growing shortage of banks.

Simon Sarmiento, who runs the Thinking Anglicans website, said that an issue was “the continual closure of bank branches in smaller towns, so that there’s a longer distance to go to make the actual cash deposits into a bank.” —Religion News

Service

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