

Electronic giving makes it easier to support parish

It's not just mounds of snow that many parishes are digging out of these days. Without people in the pews to make regular contributions, many faith communities are also struggling to overcome piles of bills – including unexpected ones relating to the high cost of snow removal.

Electronic giving, which allows parishioners to have their contributions automatically deducted from their bank or credit card accounts, is helping some pastors meet the challenge head on.

"It eases the finances and provides a solid consistency," said Redemptorist Father John Kingsbury, pastor of St. Mary in Annapolis. His Anne Arundel County parish has been using Faith Direct, an electronic giving system, for several years. More than 400 parishioners participate in the program, providing a base of about 25 percent of all that is donated in the weekly collection.

The pastor said electronic giving saves the parish the time and expense of counting, processing and depositing donations. The company that runs the program is paid with a small percentage of what is collected.

"There's a cost to us," Father Kingsbury said, "but the benefits are worth it."

The Faith Direct system debits donors' designated accounts once a month for the total offertory and second-collection contributions that have been authorized. The church receives the contribution within four business days. It operates in much the same way banks offer automatic bill payment options.

"It's a win-win," said Father Kingsbury, noting that electronic giving provides a hassle-free way for parishioners to support their church.

Patrick Madden, executive director of the development office for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said St. Mary is one of at least six parishes that use Faith Direct. Other parishes have relationships with similar companies.

“We encourage (electronic giving) as part of the stewardship program,” Madden said. “It’s a trend we’re seeing not just here but in dioceses around the country. It is a very convenient, thoughtful way to give.”