

Rector Fr Marcus Walker shares an account of the difference digital giving has made to St Bartholomew the Great in the West Smithfield area of London.

St Bartholomew the Great is London's oldest parish church, built when Henry I, son of William the Conqueror was King of England. It survived the Great Fire of 1666 and the bombing raids of World War I and World War II.

Although the parish is steeped in history, today St Bart's draws a vibrant community from across London and there's always something going on in either one of the churches. It has also been early to adopt digital giving mechanisms, making it easier for people to give to the parish.

On their decision to introduce contactless giving devices, Fr Marcus Walker, Rector at Great St Bart's, says, "I was in the congregation one day, and wanted to demonstrate giving by making a gift myself. I reached into my wallet and realised I didn't have any cash on me. In fact, I hadn't had any cash on me for three months."

To begin with, a few volunteers went around during the service with iZettles on phones. Although it was the early days of contactless giving for St Bart's, the iZettle machines generated £1,500 in December 2018. After this the parish tried a variety of different models through the Parish Giving page, including the Goodplate, which has an electronic device in a traditional plate for giving. What they found worked best, however, was allowing people to choose their own amount – using handheld terminals, fixed terminals, and (most especially) QR codes on the notice sheet.

Congregation members of all ages have responded well to digital giving at St Bart's - 50% of gifts made digitally are over £10 and in the last 12 months St Bart's has received £61,553 through digital giving. Sometimes people make very substantial single gifts, including one of £1000 over Easter.

"Whilst QR codes were a novelty two years ago, people are used to using them now in all sorts of places," says Fr Marcus. "Older people also don't want to carry cash with them."

Fr Marcus has an important piece of advice for churches wanting to get the most out of their digital giving, "It's not enough to just have the machines, people can't use the electronic means during the collection, and won't remember at the end if you don't remind them. If you don't ask, you don't get."

In regard to getting started with digital giving, Fr Marcus has this advice, "Do it as quickly as you can and go all out. The more you make it easy for people to give, the more people will give to you."



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