

# Online giving starts this month at Southeast

By Tonia Johnson | [tjohnson@secc.org](mailto:tjohnson@secc.org)

Melany Schlader does her banking, shopping and her bill-paying online. Her embrace of the Internet is partly because of its convenience, but also because it means not having to keep track of so much paper. Or worse, forgetting to write important checks.

Like her title.

It doesn't happen often, but it's often enough to bother Schlader, who said she's been calling Southeast's accounting department once a month since summer, asking when the church would add online giving as an option.

She's about to get her wish.

Church leaders hope to start online giving beginning in early February, accounting controller Rick Loyall said.

To participate, a member must set up an account that automatically will deduct an amount from a member's account. Here's how it will work:

From the church's home page, [www.southeastchristian.org](http://www.southeastchristian.org), click on "giving." Then click on the "online giving" link, which automatically will take you to Fellowship One, the software Southeast uses to manage its membership database. From there, members can select their giving preferences:

- » Amount—The member must record a dollar amount.
- » Giving method—By credit card or deducted from a bank account via an e-check.
- » Frequency of offerings—Weekly, monthly or one-time.

Loyall said Southeast leaders have been discussing e-giving for some time, weighing benefits and doubts.

Some say they aren't considering giving online because they would miss placing their offering in the plate during service—that's a part of their worship. Loyall suggested a member still can drop an envelope in the plate with a note inside indicating he or she has given online. Instead of giving a physical check or cash during worship, a family can decide how much to give using the online option while making it a worshipful experience by praying over the decision together, he said.

Others may be wary of making any monetary transactions over the Internet. But, Loyall said, the Fellowship One software is tested daily for security. He added that confidentiality is a priority with all giving at Southeast, as very few staff members have access to information on what's been given and by whom.



Southeast members will soon be able to tithe using a new online giving option via credit card or electronic check.

"We've tested it out, and we feel comfortable about the security," he said.

Loyall said online giving will benefit the church by simplifying how offerings are processed. Because it's an automated system, church staff won't have to scan checks or input data, he said.

Also, if members who give online set up their accounts to deduct money on a regular basis, it will make contributions more predictable. For example, giving typically drops on weekends with inclement weather and during the summer months, when many members are away on vacation. With online giving, a member's offering is consistent, even when they have to miss a service.

Loyall stressed that leaders don't want anyone to go into debt by putting their offerings on credit cards. However, he said that may be a popular option since many credit cards award bonuses based on their usage.

Church leaders don't want to push online giving on anyone, Loyall said. Judging from usage at other churches, he said he figures 10-20 percent of members will use it.

The church processed about 13,000 contribution statements this year and 3,500-4,000 transactions after each weekend. Loyall said that if 10-20 percent of those were handled online, it would be a reduction of the workload.

Other churches, including Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, have the online option. In the end, whether a family opts to use online giving purely is a matter of personal choice, Loyall said. For many families, the only checks they write anymore are to the church. Internet transactions have become so commonplace that online giving is a "contemporary option." Schlader said that since most of her other expenses are handled electronically, tithing online will help keep her organized and accountable.

"I just know if it was automatically deducted monthly, it will be a priority in budget planning," she said.

***For more information:***

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For questions, call (502) 253-8950 ext. 4050.