

# Is that gift card helping your congregation or paying a scammer?

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You get an email from someone in your place of worship asking you to buy gift cards for a worthy cause. It might look legit, but hold on. Some scammers pretend to be pastors, rabbis, imams, or bishops to steal worshippers' money. Learn to spot gift card scams — or your money might end up in a scammer's collection plate.

If you get an unexpected message from legitimate looking email addresses asking you to send them money, it might be a phishing scam. Scammers use real religious leaders' names — and sometimes even your real name — in the message to get you to trust them. They'll say they need your help buying gift cards for a mission project or a surprise staff appreciation gift (so you don't tell anyone) — and that you need to act quickly. They might tell you to put money on specific types of gift cards like Apple, Target, or Google Play. Then, they'll ask you for the gift card number and PIN on the back of the cards. That's the scam. If you do it, it's like handing the scammer cash.

Scammers don't want to give you time to check out what they're saying. But don't let anyone rush you. Slow down and take these steps:

- **Talk to someone.** Don't trust the name on an email address or what the message says. Contact someone from your place of worship using a phone number you know is real, never one that's in the scammer's email. Ask if this is a real request.
- **Know how scammers tell you to pay.** A leader in your place of worship won't ask you to buy gift cards and give them the numbers off the back, but a scammer will.
- **Learn what to do if you already paid the scammer.** Contact the company that issued the gift card. Tell them it was used in a scam and ask them to refund your money. The money you paid might be gone already, but it's always worth asking if there's a way to get it back.

Share this advice with your congregation and community. If someone spots a gift card scam, tell them to report it at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/ReportFraud).



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