



# Piggy-Bank

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Several years ago I was a lead researcher on a project studying how faith-based nonprofit service organizations use social capital in their day-to-day functions. ([If you're interested, our findings are located here](#)).

One of the organizations that I was working with was a multidenominational community association serving a rather diverse inner-city neighborhood in Baltimore. I regularly attended a wide variety of organizational activities, including food pantry staffing, board meetings, and holiday fundraisers. At one of the fund-raising dinners all of the attendees were given small red plastic piggy-banks like the one pictured above. The bank was emblazoned with the logo of the community organization, and the attendees were commissioned to fill the banks with their pocket change throughout the year and bring it in once they were



filled.

This approach to fundraising reminded me of the blue tzedakah (charity) boxes distributed throughout Jewish communities worldwide (though for obvious reasons, those are not shaped like little piggies). As someone with extensive experience within both Jewish and Christian communities, I could think of no widespread Christian parallel to the tzedakah box, despite Christianity's long and storied history of charitable giving. The idea struck me as incongruous - despite the multid denominational nature of the community association, the staff and board of the organization were almost entirely Christian, with the exception of a single Jewish board member and this simply didn't seem like a normal Christian fundraising approach.

Regardless, I accepted the commission, seeing it as an extension of my participant observation and as an expression of my support for the good work being done by the organization. The bank filled quickly, but by then my research had concluded and my visits to the organization were far less common. Once filled, the little pig sat on my counter for almost a year before I finally had the opportunity to drop it off at their office.

The secretary recognized me and we exchange pleasantries after which she asked how she could help me. I presented her with the pig full of money and a surprised expression passed across her face.

"Wait right here!" she said before dashing down the hallway. Moments later she returned with the Jewish board member in tow. "Look!" She exclaimed, pointing at the pig.

He picked it up with an odd little smile and said, "Well...at least one of them came back..." The piggy-bank fundraiser had been his idea, and I, the only other Jewish guy in the room, was the only person who brought one back.