

Pastors and Pay Raises, Should They Ask?

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In February 2002, *Leadership* magazine conducted a poll of 600 evangelical clergy, asking the question, “Is it appropriate for a pastor to ask for a raise?” This was followed by another question, “While serving as a pastor, have you ever asked for a raise?” Ninety percent of the respondents said that it was appropriate for pastors to ask for raises, but less than 65 percent of them had ever asked for one, even though the majority of those who said that they had not asked felt that their financial situation would have been improved if they had asked.

The third and final question was asked pastors who had said that they had never asked for a raise. To these was asked the question, “Why have you not asked?” Thirty-eight percent of the respondents said their churches had no policy for giving pay increases; 20 percent said that the pastor receives a cost-of-living increase when the church has excess funds and feels that it can afford it; 13 percent said they hesitated to ask for an increase because they were concerned about how a salary increase would affect the stability of the finances of the church; and 12 percent felt that their positions could be in jeopardy if they were to ask for a pay increase. In other words, they felt that they probably would be asked to leave if they asked for a raise.

If this poll reflects any indication of truth in America, then it seems quite obvious that most pastors are hesitant to talk to their boards, finance committees, and/or congregations about money—especially if they are talking about more money for the pastor.

According to financial professional Joseph Rinaldo of Ministers Life Resources/Minnesota Mutual, “*Clergy take a vow of obedience, not poverty. God never said His servants had to be destitute... If pastors are always falling short of meeting their family's financial needs, it permeates everything about the ministry. So, they need to annually remind their church boards that a compensation evaluation and discussion is needed—regardless of the pastor's reluctance to do so. Without an open exchange, pastor and board can only assume and guess.*”

Even so, asking to receive a raise is generally easier said than done for pastors. Pastors should enter into salary discussions with their boards and/or finance committees with two goals in mind: to produce a fair salary and to avoid any hint of an adversarial relationship with the board.

Pastors' responsibility in discussion

Pastors should begin the discussion process by being up front and open, realistic, and honest about their financial needs and expectations. Along with presenting their budgets, representing their families financial needs, pastors need to share with board members the typical job of pastors: the long hours spent in sermon preparation, hospital visitation, counseling, administrative details, physical work on the church facility, late-night phone calls, funerals, weddings, the pressure to preach inspiring sermons (knowing that one mistake may cost negative ripples that could result in the loss of attendance), representing the church to the community, and having to always be uplifting and stimulating regardless of how he or she feels personally. In

short, this is the pastors' opportunity to show their boards that pastoring is more than Sunday morning sermon preparation; it is an on-call, 24-hours-a-day profession.

However, in order to have the boards' sympathetic ear, pastors must live their lives consistent with guidelines established in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1: 6-9. Characteristics like being above reproach, temperate, free from the love of money, having a good reputation with those outside the church, being in control of their own families and others presented in these two Bible passages cannot be compromised or ignored.

Boards' responsibility in discussion

The Bible exhorts us to *“Appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work”* (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). The love mentioned here can well manifest itself through compassionate care, concern, objectivity, and generosity when it comes time for pastors' annual compensation review, with special **note** that any pay increase less than the cost of living rate for the previous 12 months should not be considered a pay increase, and should not be considered by its board members.

Just as the business community requires an evaluation of anyone in a position of responsibility, so should the church board. This evaluation should be in-depth, meaningful, and should be done by the members of the board or by top spiritual leaders of the church appointed by the board. Afterward, results of the evaluation should be shared with the pastor to help him realize his strengths and weaknesses. The following checkpoints should be part of any pastor evaluation.

- **Responsibility:**
 - The number of people under the pastor's direct supervision, the number to whom the pastor ministers, and outside the church responsibilities (ministerial associations, community leadership, humanitarian involvement, and so on).
- **Replaceability:**
 - The degree of difficulty in replacing the pastor with another of equal competence and qualifications.
- **Teamwork:**
 - The degree of interacting with, contributing to, and mutually supporting other ministries and/or departments within the church. Reputation of the church from outside of the church congregation (willing to work for the betterment of the community, willing to work and cooperate with other churches and/or ministries, and so on).
- **Quality:**
 - The degree of effectiveness in: (1) discipleship and leadership development; (2) evangelism, missionary outreach, edification, and equipping; (3) creativity and innovation; (4) excitement, dedication, commitment, and confidence engendered in the congregation.
- **Qualification:**
 - Number of years as a pastor, years in the ministry, education, background and history, and experience.

- **Thrust:**
 - The degree of commitment to further the total church ministry.

When exploring avenues of pastoral compensation, boards need to investigate all areas, not just salary. Some of these include the following.

- **Reimbursement**
 - The church should pay for what it costs to have a pastor. This would involve a car allowance, professional dues, travel expenses, business meals, and so on. In short, costs that other businesses generally provide should be reimbursed.
- **Benefits**
 - Any compensation package should include health and life insurance, disability insurance, and contributions to a retirement plan. All of these should be in addition to the pastor's salary.
- **Housing**
 - If the church doesn't provide a parsonage, a stated housing allowance over and above salary should be given.

In Summary

In today's Christian America, many boards and/or congregations make a huge mistake in committing funds to church plants, programs, and church plant operating expenses rather than to people—particularly the pastor. God does not provide growth through bigger buildings or more programs but through committed, dedicated, and God-fearing individuals (pastors) who love God, love the work of the Lord, and are in turn loved and appreciated by the people of the congregation. Faithfulness to God's Word and the competent and dedicated labors of His servants whom He has called to shepherd His flock are the keys to church growth. Financial resources should be directed at people first, then programs and church plants.