

Q: “Should the pastor know what members give?”

A: In the early 1990s John and Sylvia Ronsvalle conducted an in-depth study of stewardship attitudes and practices in Christian churches and shared a summary report in their book titled *Behind the Stained Glass Windows* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996).

Their research—gained from parish pastors, synod and Churchwide leaders and seminary faculty members from many denominations—indicated that a large majority (over 75 percent) of the above church leaders believe that what a member gives is a strong indication of spiritual maturity. Ironically, when that same group of leaders was asked whether or not members want their pastors to know the individual giving amounts of members, approximately the same percentage (over 75 percent) said no.

The irony here is that most will agree that the level of giving is a spiritual issue, but most also believe that members do not want their spiritual leader, the pastor, to know this information about their members.

Our best counsel for pastors and church leaders is to deal openly and honestly with this issue. In most congregations, the financial secretary knows the giving amounts of members. Sometimes the entire stewardship committee and certainly tellers may know the giving amounts of members. And yet, in many congregations the members do not want the pastor to know. Why?

Here are some questions to ponder:

- Is it a trust issue? Are members willing to “trust” the financial secretary but not the pastor?
- If a giving level is indeed an important spiritual measurement, shouldn’t the pastor, the person with the God-given accountability of overseeing the spiritual welfare of members, have access to this information?
- If a sudden drop in giving is an indicator of a problem, shouldn’t the pastor have ready access to that information?

Few people would argue about whether or not their doctors should know vital and sometimes very personal information about them, like blood pressure, pulse rate, cholesterol reading and lifestyle issues. Such information is necessary for doctors to treat their patients competently. Shouldn’t pastors also have important information about their members so they can be competent spiritual leaders? Think it through.

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