

6 Secrets Some Pastors Don't Want You to Know

A deacon told me he and his wife witnessed a fistfight their first Sunday at our church. The story comes at the end of this.

Now, perhaps a better title of this should be "Secrets *some* pastors *perhaps* don't want you to know."

It goes like this:

Let's suppose you are considering joining Clearview Springs Church. The ministers and leadership are glad to welcome you. Your presence can fill a pew, your offerings can fund the work, and your efforts can enhance the ministries.

So, yes, they want you. And that's why the pastor might keep certain things from you, at least when you are visiting.

Some things the pastor would rather you not know; some he doesn't want anyone to know, period.

I've thought of these six; you'll think of others ...

1. **The pastor doesn't not want you to know the sordid history of this church.** If prospective members knew that 18 months ago, the church split five ways, they might want to go elsewhere. So, you put your best foot forward.

All things equal, most people would prefer a church that is healthy and has never been torn apart by conflict. Those are few and far between, in my estimation. So, we should jettison the perfectionism (which we put on everyone except ourselves) and simply ask the Father where He wants us. A church with a bad past can be made well and whole as the people fix their eyes on Jesus and obey the Father.

2. **The pastor might prefer you not learn how things get done around here.** The old line is that no one should see how sausage or their laws are made. In some churches, decision-making is just as messy.

In many churches—particularly mega-congregations—the membership has no clue how decisions are made. Sometimes that can be good, sometimes not so good. It depends on so much.

A democracy is slow, cumbersome and messy to be sure. But congregational rule is still the best, for my money. Churchill is reported to have said, “Democracy is the worst form of government in the world—except for all those other kinds.”

3. **The pastor will not tell who is making life miserable for him.** The pastor wishes someone knew so they could step up and defend him or deal with the troublemaker, but he isn't comfortable in telling others and suffers alone.

I suggest to church leaders that if they suspect someone is burdening the pastor with their criticism, demands or harassment, they take steps to find out, then deal with it. The pastor is the last person to have to handle his critics.

Because the pastor is an employee of the church, a mean-spirited power person may be able to get him fired. But that person cannot fire you, the layperson. You have an invincibility because he has no power over you. So, stand up for your pastor if you feel someone is making life miserable for him.

4. **The pastor will not reveal his doubts.** You might lose confidence in him if you knew. And he knows from past experience that he will work these out with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, not revealing his doubts is a good thing.

Psalm 73 is a great help on this subject. The psalmist,

whoever it was, came close to admitting his doubts to others. That could have had grave consequences. Before doing so, he went down to the house of God to pray and there received a new perspective on things.

A seminary professor once told our class, "I'm not here to give you my doubts. I figure you have enough of your own."

5. The pastor will not admit his failings in the past.

Perhaps his past is no worse than anyone else's. But some church members cannot deal with their pastor having sinned like the rest of humanity.

Somewhere I read of a woman bragging on her minister for his holiness. He replied, "Madam, if you knew all about me, you would spit in my face." Even if that were true, but I wouldn't say it. Keep it to yourself, pastor. Go forward. God has forgiven you in the same way He has all the rest of us.

Transparency has its limitations.

6. The pastor will not confess failings in his home life.

It's not the business of anyone else if he and his wife sometimes have an argument or disagree on methods of child-rearing.

Only after my wife, Margaret, and I went through a long period of marital counsel did we share with the congregation about our rocky marriage and struggle to make it healthy. Most people appreciated hearing it, judging by the large number who called the next day asking for marriage counsel for themselves, but no doubt a few were unhappy hearing that their preacher was this human.

A huge Scripture in my arsenal is Psalm 103:14. "For he knows how we are formed; He remembers that we are dust." God is under no illusions about us. He who created us knows we are made of humble stuff. When we fail Him, the only one surprised is us. What's why the grace of God is so wonderful and was

present from the very beginning.

OK now. The pastor keeps these things to himself, but he sure wishes some things:

–He wishes someone was praying for him and his family.

–He wishes his wife had more friends in the church.

–He wishes he knew how to balance the demands/needs of the church with the needs of his home.

Pray for your pastor. And keep your eyes on Jesus, not on him.

Okay, the story I promised: Pat and Betty Hance were members of First Baptist Church of Charlotte, North Carolina, when I pastored there in the 1980s. One day, Pat told me that the first time they visited the church, they witnessed a fist fight in the Sunday school room. I was stunned.

There was bad blood between two men in the church, Pat said. I think one was a bully and the other had taken all he was going to. He had told the bully the next time he did something, he would make him pay.

“We were sitting in the Sunday school assembly,” Pat said, “and just before it started, the bully walked past and smarted off to the other man. The little fellow stood up and knocked the daylights out of him.”

I said, “Pat, we preachers always want to impress newcomers with our church. We will go out of our way to charm them. And yet, you and your wife not only witnessed a fight the first day you attended, but you ended up joining the church. Explain that to me.”

He said, “Oh, we like an active church.”

I’ve told that to a church when we were going through a bad time and added, “We have an active church.”

It always gets a laugh, and that's a good thing. {eoa}

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