

## Should my Church Share Budget Updates in the Bulletin?

I grew up 20 miles south of Seattle. After serving in the Navy and graduating from Corban University I was hired at a church in Oregon just 200 miles south and served there until 2014. I mention this for two reasons.

First, during that time I learned to question (probably like you) whether church guests, seekers, and casual attenders were getting the best impression of the church if we were printing the monthly financials in the bulletin or other circulations.

Second, since I was so close geographically to Seattle, and I ministered chronologically at a time that Mars Hill Church was gaining popularity I was in their shadow. Friends followed their pastor closely, friends visited the church occasionally, and friends were influenced heavily by their ministry model and ministry “vibe” of the pastor and church.

I haven’t been able to shake the 20-year discomfort I have felt (though it’s often been necessary) to put the monthly church financials in print for our congregation. The discomfort is extra strange because I *really* enjoy preaching and talking about personal and organizational finances.

This changed for me a couple of summers ago.

I’m about to say something, but don’t think I’m saying this because I think I’m cool. I know I’m not. My “father figure” and my kids, and wife give evidential proof – often. I listened to the podcast put about by Christianity Today a few years ago entitled *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*.

It’s a fantastic (well, actually, horrifying) study in church organizational leadership.

But, to my point. Towards the end of the many episodes there are accusations recorded about how the pastor and others portrayed giving to the church and the church’s use of money. I’ll leave it at that.

I fancy myself an honest guy. I am very careful about handling my personal finances and even more careful with how I handle church finances. What I heard in the podcast was nothing short of disgusting and I was changed in a matter of a few moments.

The lack of transparency in their dealings, lack of accountability with other church leaders, the lack of willingness to answer sincere questions by involved attenders, the intention to hide and remain hidden, these all made me believe that if I offend a few new people or old people – wait, I mean, long time attenders – then I can easily expunge the offense by

explaining the desire to simply be open and accountable with the church. I've come to believe that a written explanation that we're a non-profit who seeks to serve the generosity of our members by reporting our financials is refreshing for most people.

Our fear is that giving will go down. Our fear is that we don't want to appear greedy or only money centered. Our fear is that we become dealers of "guilt to give" rather than giving with a heart of generosity. Our fear is that new people will not return because we talk about money – but really *how* you talk about it might teach them how to be better stewards themselves.

I've come to believe that people like to talk about money. We can help them talk about it as godly stewards should.

And here too, Proverbs 16:2 (ESV) can guide our reporting, "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit".

#### **Pastor Rob's Financial Tip**

Pastor, is your church doing a halfway decent job of reporting the financials both when it's going well and when it's going poorly?